*Chapter III*

# ON THUCYDIDES' WAR OF THE PELOPONNESIANS AND THE ATHENIANS

## 1. *Political Philosophy and Political History*

In turning from Aristotle and Plato to Thucydides, we seem to enter an entirely different world. This is no longer the world of political philosophy, of the quest for the best regime which is possible, although it never was, is, or will be actual, for the shining and pure temple built on a noble elevation, far away from vulgar clamor and everything else disharmonious. Seen in the light of the best polity, of the truly just order, of justice or philosophy, political life or political greatness loses much, if not all, of its charm; only the charm of the greatness of the founder and legislator seems to survive the severest of all tests. When we open Thucydides' pages, we become at once immersed in political life at its most intense, in bloody war both foreign and civil, in life and death struggles. Thucydides sees political life in its own light; he does not transcend it; he does not stand above the turmoil but in the midst of it; he takes seriously political life as it is; he knows only of actual cities, statesmen, commanders of armies and navies, citizens and demagogues as distinguished from founders and legislators; he presents to us political life in its harsh grandeur, ruggedness, and even squalor. It suffices to remember how Socrates on the one hand and Thucydides on the other speak of Themistocles and Pericles, and how Plato on the one hand and Thucydides on the other present Nicias. Thucydides sympathizes and makes us sympathize with political greatness as displayed in fighting for freedom and in the founding, ruling, and expanding of empires. The loudest event that takes place in the Platonic dialogues is the drunken Alcibiades' irruption into a banquet of his friends. Thucydides lets us hear the

delirious hopes at the beginning of the Sicilian expedition and the indescribable anguish in the quarries of Syracuse. He looks at political things not only in the same direction as the citizen or statesman but also within the same horizon. And yet he is not simply a political man. We indicate the difference between Thucydides and the political man as such by calling Thucydides, as tradition bids us do, a historian.

However profound the difference between Plato and Thucydides may be, their teachings are not necessarily incompatible; they may supplement one another. Thucydides' theme is the greatest war known to him, the greatest "motion." The best city described in the *Republic* (and in the *Politics*) is at rest. But in the sequel to the *Republic* Socrates expresses the desire to see the best city "in motion," *i.e.* at war; "the best city in motion" is the necessary sequel to the speech on the best city. Socrates feels unable to praise properly, to present properly the best city in motion.[1] The philosopher's speech on the best city requires a supplement which the philosopher cannot give. The description of the best city which avoids everything accidental deals with a nameless city and nameless men living in an indeterminate place and at an indeterminate time (cf. *Republic* 499c8–d1). Yet a war can only be a war between this particular city and other particular cities, under these or these leaders, at this or that time. Socrates seems to call for the assistance of a man like Thucydides who could supplement political philosophy or complete it. As it happens, Critias, one of Socrates' three interlocutors, had heard as a child from his very old grandfather who had heard it from his father who had heard it from his kinsman and close friend Solon who had heard it from an Egyptian priest that in very ancient times Athens, being then a supremely excellent city, waged war against Atlantis, an unbelievably large island in the west; the people of Atlantis, led by their kings—men of marvellously great power—attempted to enslave Athens and the rest of Greece and all countries bordering on the Mediterranean; but Athens, partly as leader of the Greeks and partly acting alone when the others had deserted her, defeated the assailants and thus saved all Mediterranean peoples from enslavement. It is this truthful speech, not a fictitious myth (*Timaeus* 26e4–5), which is to be the supplement to Socrates' account of the best city. It reminds of

[1] *Timaeus* 19b3–d2, 20b3.

Thucydides' work not only because it is an account of "the greatest motion" but because the Atlantic war reminds of the Peloponnesian war or more precisely of the Sicilian part of that war; the Atlantic war reminds of the Sicilian expedition while surpassing it infinitely. It surpasses it in the first place by the gigantic size both of the island in the west and of its armed host. It surpasses it above all by its glory: whereas the Athenians' unjust attack on the island in the west ended in ignominious defeat, the Athenians' just defense of all Greece and everything near to Greece against the unjustly attacking men of the island in the west ended in most glorious victory. The victory over Atlantis by far surpasses in magnitude and in glory the combined actual victory in the Persian war and the hoped-for victory in the Sicilian expedition. It looks as if some Critias had attempted to surpass Critias' competitor Alcibiades by a speech infinitely surpassing Alcibiades' deeds and plans which in themselves were already almost incredible. This however seems only to confirm the first impression of the relation between Plato and Thucydides: the Peloponnesian war was waged by an Athens which was informed by a regime regarded as defective by both Thucydides and Plato and which was known to them through their seeing it; the Atlantic war was waged by an Athens which was informed by a superlatively good regime and which is known only through the report of an Egyptian priest. Nevertheless there is one point of no small importance in which the two thinkers agree. Plato did not permit his Critias to describe Athens' superlative glory: he did not wish to allow an Athenian to praise Athens. Thucydides, the historian, was indeed compelled to permit his Pericles to praise Athens. But he did his best to prevent Pericles' Funeral Speech from being mistaken for his own praise of Athens.

Whichever way we turn, we seem to be compelled to fall back on the trite assertion that Thucydides is distinguished from Plato by the fact that he is a historian. To understand him as a historian is particularly easy for us, the sons of the age of historicism. There even seems to be a particularly close kinship between the "scientific history" of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and Thucydides' thought; as a matter of fact, Thucydides has been called a "scientific historian." But the differences between Thucydides and the scientific historians are immense. In the first place, Thucydides limits himself severely to military and diplomatic history and at most to political history; while he does not ignore the "economic factor," he

says amazingly little about it; he says next to nothing regarding cultural, religious, or intellectual history. Secondly, his work is meant to be a possession for all times, whereas the works of the scientific historians do not seriously claim to be "definitive." Thirdly, Thucydides does not merely narrate and explain actions and quote official documents but he inserts speeches, composed by him, of the actors. Yet Thucydides may be a historian without being a historian in the modern sense. What then is a historian in the pre-modern sense? According to Aristotle, the historian presents what has happened whereas the poet presents the kind of things that might happen: "therefore poetry is more philosophic and more serious than history, for poetry states rather the universals, history however states the singulars."[2] Poetry is between history and philosophy: history and philosophy stand at opposite poles; history is simply unphilosophic or pre-philosophic; it deals with individuals (individual human beings, individual cities, individual kingdoms or empires, individual confederations); whereas philosophy deals with the species as species, history does not even let us see the species in the individuals and through them as poetry does. Philosophy, for instance, deals with war as such, or the city as such, whereas Thucydides deals only with the war between the Peloponnesians and the Athenians. Aristotle thus shows implicitly that there is no opposition between philosophy and history, as little as there is between philosophy and poetry. But the question is whether Thucydides is a historian in Aristotle's sense. Occasionally Thucydides seems to suggest that he is a historian in that sense. The notion of history implied in the passage in question (I 97.2) may be stated as follows: it is desirable and even necessary that we should have at our disposal a continuous, reliable, and clear account of what men and cities did and suffered at all times, the account of each time being written by a contemporary. Yet Thucydides suggests this notion of history in order to explain or to excuse a seemingly unnecessary digression from his work; he does not suggest this notion when stating the reason why he wrote his work. Seen within the context of his whole work, that suggestion reads like a rejection of the view of history which it conveys. The reason why he rejects that view is not difficult to discern. When he explains why he wrote his account of the Peloponnesian war, he stresses the unique importance of that event. The vulgar notion, pre-modern or modern,

[2] *Poetics* 1451a36–b11.

of history does not make sufficient allowance for the difference between the important and the unimportant.

Above all, Thucydides surely lets us see the universal in the individual event which he narrates and through it: it is for this reason that his work is meant to be a possession for all times. On the basis of the Aristotelian remark one is therefore compelled to say that Thucydides is not a historian simply but a historian-poet; he does in the element of prose what the poets do in the element of poetry. Yet he is as little a historian-poet as he is a historian simply. While he states explicitly what he regards as his task, he does not state explicitly what he regards as the task of the historian. As a matter of fact, in contradistinction to Herodotus he never speaks of "history"; this fact alone could make one hesitate to call him a historian. He does state what he regards as the characteristic of the poets: the poets present things as bigger and grander than they are (I 21.1 and 10.1) whereas he presents them exactly as they are. The decisive reason why we must abandon the attempt to understand Thucydides in the light of the Aristotelian distinction is that that distinction presupposes philosophy and we have no right to assume that philosophy is present in Thucydides or for Thucydides. Perhaps Thucydides' "quest for the truth" (I 20.3) antedates essentially, *i.e.* not temporally, the distinction between history and philosophy. His work is meant to be a possession for all times because it enables those who will read it in future times to know the truth not only regarding the past, *i.e.* the Peloponnesian war and "the old things" preceding it (cf. I 1.3 beg.), but regarding their own times as well (I 22.4); the toil which Thucydides has invested in discovering the truth about the Peloponnesian war (and "the old things") will dispense those readers from investing a comparable toil in understanding the events of their times; his work presents the results of a kind of inquiry (or of "history") which makes that kind of inquiry superfluous. If we may use the Aristotelian distinction once more, Thucydides has discovered in the "singulars" of his time (and of "the old things") the "universal." It is not altogether misleading to refer to the Platonic parallel: Plato too can be said to have discovered in a singular event—in the singular life of Socrates—the universal and thus to have become able to present the universal through presenting a singular.

At the time when the tradition stemming from Aristotle was being decisively shaken, Hobbes turned from Aristotle to Thucydi-

des. He too understood Thucydides as a historian as distinguished from a philosopher. But he understood the relation between the historian and the philosopher differently than did Aristotle. The philosopher's part is "the open conveyance of precepts" whereas history is "merely narrative." History too then conveys precepts; to take the most important example, according to Hobbes, Thucydides' work teaches the superiority of monarchy to any other form of government but especially to democracy. Yet at any rate in a good history "the narrative doth secretly instruct the reader, and more effectually than can possibly be done by precept." To support his assertion that Thucydides instructs his readers secretly, Hobbes adduces the judgments of Justus Lipsius and, above all, of Marcellinus: "Marcellinus saith, he was obscure on purpose; that the common people might not understand him. And not unlikely; for a wise man should so write (though in words understood by all men), that wise men only should be able to commend him." Since Thucydides is "the most politic historiographer that ever writ," his reader "may from the narrations draw out lessons to himself": Thucydides does not draw out the lessons. Hobbes sees then the characteristic difference between the historian (or at any rate the most politic historian) and the philosopher in the fact that the historian presents the universals silently. He takes it for granted that the speeches which Thucydides has inserted do not convey the instruction in question; the speeches are "of the contexture of the narrative."[3] This implies that no sentiment expressed in a speech of a Thucydidean character can be as such ascribed to Thucydides. This iron rule is not qualified but merely rendered more precise by the following corollary: the fact that a Thucydidean character expresses a given view proves that that view was known to Thucydides; it may therefore be used for completing a view stated by Thucydides himself if the former view is evidently implied in the latter view. Far from impairing Thucydides' reticence, the speeches only increase it. Since he is so reticent regarding the universals and the speeches are so rich in pithily and forcefully expressed statements regarding them, he as it were seduces the readers into taking these statements as expressing his own view. The temptation becomes almost irresistible when the speakers express views which no intelligent or decent man seems able to gainsay.

[3] Hobbes, *English Works* (ed. Molesworth) VIII, pp. viii, xvi–xvii, xxii, xxix, and xxxii. Cf. *Opera Latina* (ed. Molesworth) I, pp. lxxxviii and xiii–xiv.

If Thucydides is as reticent as Hobbes's suggestive remarks may induce us to think, it seems to be well-nigh impossible to establish Thucydides' teaching with any degree of certainty. Hobbes held that Thucydides, "as he was of regal descent, so he best approved of the regal government."[4] Hardly anyone living today would agree with this judgment. Today not a few people believe that Thucydides, far from being simply opposed to democracy, was in sympathy with the imperialism which went with the Athenian democracy or that he believed in "power politics"; accordingly they hold that Thucydides' comprehensive view is stated by the Athenians in their dialogue with the Melians. This interpretation is indeed rendered possible by Thucydides' reticence, by his failure to pass judgment on that dialogue. Yet the same silence would justify also the opposite interpretation. The contemporary interpreters of Thucydides who are perceptive note the presence in his thought of that which transcends "power politics," of what one may call the human or the humane. But if one addresses to Thucydides the question of how the power political and the humane are reconciled with one another, one receives no answer from him.[5]

After one has recovered from one's first impression, one is amazed to see how many and how important judgments Thucydides makes explicitly, in his own name. These judgments form the only legitimate starting point for the understanding of his teaching.

## 2. *The Case for Sparta: Moderation and the Divine Law*

Thucydides' first explicit judgment is to the effect that the war between the Peloponnesians and the Athenians was greater than the earlier wars. In order to prove this assertion, he must show "the weakness of the ancients." He thus deprives antiquity of the splendor which, it seems, was the work of the poets who celebrated antiquity. While following the way from ancient weakness to present strength, he sketches the emergence of the protagonists of the present war, of Athens and Sparta. Because of the poverty of the soil of their country which therefore was not desired by others, the Athenians were left in peace and thus their city grew to some greatness much earlier than Sparta. The Athenians were the first who, relaxing the ancient, barbaric style of life, turned toward

[4] *English Works* VIII, p. xvii.

[5] Karl Reinhardt, *Vermächtnis der Antike* (Göttingen, 1960) 216–217.

rather luxurious practices. Yet the Spartans were the first to introduce a style of life which is peculiarly Greek, a style of republican simplicity and equality, a mean between barbaric penury and barbaric pomp. Accordingly, Sparta has enjoyed order and freedom from a very old time without interruption; her regime has remained the same during the preceding 400 years; her regime is then the oldest of the present Greek regimes; her regime, *i.e.* not war, was and is the source of her outstanding power. Sparta liberated Greece from the rule of tyrants and, above all, she was the leader of the Greeks in the Persian war. Sparta's power is greater than her "looks" might seem to bear out: hers is a solid power. The connection between Sparta's power and her regime to which Thucydides draws our attention near the beginning of his book is brought out most clearly in what he says about Sparta near the end: the Spartans, above all others of whom Thucydides had any direct knowledge, succeeded in being prosperous and moderate at the same time. The Athenians became moderate and established a moderate regime induced by disaster, when they were cast down by fright. The Spartans on the other hand were moderate also in prosperity thanks to their stable and moderate regime which bred moderation.[6] Thucydides' taste is the same as that of Plato and Aristotle.

Someone might say that Sparta's superiority with regard to republican virtue, political stability, and moderation is only the reverse side of her inferiority in other, perhaps more important respects, for instance regarding imperial greatness and brilliance. This objection receives apparent support from Thucydides' final judgment on the manner of the two antagonists: the Athenians were militarily superior to the Spartans because they were quick and enterprising whereas the Spartans were slow and unwilling to dare (VIII 96.5). Considering the kinship between slowness, caution, circumspection, and moderation,[7] the judgment could be thought to imply that moderation is a defect in war. But even in this respect moderation is not unqualifiedly a defect; after all, the Spartans won the war. However this may be, we surely must find out what Thucydides thinks of the status of moderation simply.

Thucydides reveals his taste most explicitly and most comprehensively in his reflections on how the civil wars which occurred in

[6] I 2.5–6, 6.3–5, 10.2–3, 13.1, 15.2, 18.1–2, VIII 1, 24.4, 96–97.
[7] Plato, *Charmides* 159bff.

the Greek cities during the Peloponnesian war affected the manners of judging and of acting (III 82–83). These manners became altogether depraved. The depravation showed itself in the abandonment of the customary praising and blaming as well as of the customary ways of acting. It consisted in the complete triumph of the spirit of daring and its kin over that of moderation and its kin. Men came to praise the most reckless daring, quickness, anger, revenge, distrust, secrecy, and fraud, and to blame moderation, caution, trust, good-naturedness, open and frank dealings; what was called manliness took the place of moderation. The decay in speech and in deed of moderation was accompanied by the decay of respect for law, not only for the laws laid down by men but for the divine law as well,[8] and for right and the benefit of the city as distinguished from the benefit of one's faction (be it the many or the few). Moderation, justice, and piety belong together; their enemy calls itself daring and shrewdness or intelligence. While not every civil war is a consequence of foreign war and not every foreign war culminates in civil war, there is nevertheless a kinship between war and civil war: both cities and individuals have better thoughts in peace and when things go well than in war; war is a violent teacher, *i.e.* a teacher of violence by violence, which strengthens the angry passions not indeed of all men but of most; war is an intermediate stage between peace and civil war. This means that moderation, justice, and piety and the praise of these ways of conduct are at home in the city at peace rather than in the city at war. From all this it would seem to follow that the fully developed contrast between Sparta and Athens is that between the city at peace and the city in the grip of civil war. It would seem to follow more particularly that a good regime (like the Spartan) is averse to war and will avoid every war which can be avoided. Above all, it would seem to follow that even if moderation should be a handicap in war, its superiority to its opposite will not become doubtful.

The depravation caused by civil war, that man-made plague,

[8] The divine law is preceded in the context (III 82.6) by kinship (the family) and the established laws (the city); the order appears to be one of ascent. Here Thucydides no longer speaks of the change in the meaning of words (*ibid.* 4–5); he does not mean that in civil war kinship, etc., are no longer called kinship, etc., but that they are no longer held in high esteem. As a consequence, he does not tell us what piety (*ibid.* 8) is called after it has fallen into contempt.

resembles the depravation caused by the plague proper. The overwhelming force of the plague, the universal insecurity brought about general lawlessness, the surrender to the pleasures of the moment. Neither fear of the gods or piety nor human law restrained anyone. The distinction between the pleasant and the noble collapsed: the noble was sacrificed to the pleasant (II 52.3, 53). Depravation is, above all, the destruction of moderation.

Thucydides' favorable judgment on Sparta—a judgment whose major premise is the goodness of moderation, justice, and piety—is reflected in some of the speeches which he has inserted. The judgments of his speakers cannot be identical with his own since the speakers are not simply concerned with the truth but with the interests of their city or faction. The Corinthian's first speech in Sparta (I 68–71) is meant to incite the Spartans to go to war at once against Athens. In order to show the Spartans the magnitude of the danger threatening them at the hands of the Athenians and also to explain the Spartans' seeming inability to comprehend that danger, they contrast the Spartan character with the Athenian. The characteristic Spartan qualities are said to be these: moderation, tranquillity or restfulness, satisfaction with what they possess, hence clinging to immutable laws and aversion to being away from home, old-fashionedness, reliability, and trust among themselves coupled with distrust of foreigners and hence neglect, even betrayal, of their allies, hesitation, slowness, lack of inventiveness, no trust even in the safest calculations, apprehensiveness. The Athenian manner is the opposite: always restless, innovating, quick to invent and to execute, daring beyond their power, full of hope, and so on. The Spartans will have to change their manners and to assimilate themselves to the Athenians in order to overcome the danger. The Athenians who reply to the Corinthians (I 72–78) wish to induce the Spartans to remain at rest and to deliberate slowly. They wish then to induce the Spartans to continue in their manner which proved to be so conducive to Athens' increase. Accordingly they must show that the difference between Athens and Sparta is not as radical, as dangerous to Sparta, as the Corinthians had asserted. They do this partly by being silent about that difference and partly by stating generally that the Athenian manner is not different from the manner common to all men (and hence also to the Spartans): the difference is due only to the difference of circumstances. They are almost silent about the possibility that the difference of circumstances might have

brought about the very difference of manner which is stressed by Thucydides himself, by the Corinthians and above all by Pericles in his Funeral Speech. They do say that the primary motive for Athenian expansion was fear or concern with security. Yet even they speak with pride of the singular daring and intelligence to which Athens owes her greatness. The Spartan king Archidamus who was reputed to be both intelligent and moderate wishes to preserve the peace (I 79–85). He recommends tranquil and slow deliberation. He is therefore compelled to defend the Spartan manner which according to the Corinthians has brought Sparta into grave danger. At the same time he must, just as the Athenians and for the same reason, minimize the difference between the Spartan and the Athenian manner. This Spartan, we may say, is compelled to praise the Spartan manner in a Spartan manner. His speech breathes sober apprehension regarding the proposed war or the absence of all hope except regarding the possibility of reaching some peaceful agreement with Athens; that hope is based on the possibility that the Athenians might prefer in the Spartan manner the tranquil possession of what they have to the risks of war. He asserts that the Spartan qualities to which the Corinthians objected are the cause of Spartan freedom and her outstanding renown. Moderation guarantees against insolent pride in success and against abjectness in disaster. It makes the Spartans wise in counsel and brave in battle, for it is akin to reverance or sense of shame which in its turn is akin to bravery, and it makes them submit to the superior wisdom of the laws.

Even if Thucydides would have agreed with Archidamus in every other point, he disagreed with his appraisal of the situation. According to Thucydides, the Spartans who were so averse to taking risks and so slow to go to war were compelled by the Athenians to go to war against the Athenians. Thucydides agrees then in effect with the harsh and unpleasant Spartan ephor who opposed Archidamus' peaceable counsel in the Spartan assembly; Thucydides does not say that Archidamus had in fact good judgment but merely that he was reputed to have good judgment (I 23.6, 84, 88, 118.2). If we take into consideration the connection between moderation, reverence for antiquity, and above all for the divine law, we are not surprised to learn that when the Spartans sent to Delphi to ask the god whether they should go to war against Athens, he assured them of victory if they would wage that war with all their might,

and told them in addition that he himself would help them, called or uncalled (I 118.3). And the Spartans won the war.

If we take into consideration the connection between moderation, gentleness, justice, and the divine law, we understand not only Thucydides' admiration for the Spartan manner, but above all his humanity which might seem to come to sight only on the margin of a power-political text but which is more likely to point to the boundary or limit separating lawful and unlawful politics. He reveals his compassion for the victims of angry passion or even murderous savagery most clearly when he speaks of the lamentable disaster which befell Mycalessus, a small town possessing a large school for children—of the senseless and cowardly butchery of women, children, and beasts (VII 29.4–5, 30.3). He reveals himself above all in his remark about the fate of Nicias: Nicias deserved least of all Greeks of Thucydides' time his disastrous end because of his full dedication, guided and inspired by law, to the practice of excellence (VII 86.5; cf. 77.2–3). As Thucydides narrates in the same context, Nicias' fellow commander Demosthenes came to a no less disastrous end. But—this is implied in his judgment on Nicias—Demosthenes' fate was not so entirely undeserved as that of Nicias, since Demosthenes was not as fully dedicated to law-bred virtue. The connection, expected by Thucydides, between the dedication, guided by law and surely also by divine law, to virtue and a good end, between desert and fate, points to the rule of just gods.

After Thucydides had completed the proof of his assertion that the ancients were weak and in addition had spoken of his manner of treating both the ancient things and the Peloponnesian war itself, he adds a chapter (I 23) which concludes his Introduction in an apparently strange way. The chapter ceases to appear strange if one reads it by itself with a view to the question of how it might be a fitting conclusion to the Introduction, and if one keeps in mind the message conveyed by Thucydides' most comprehensive judgments. The chapter consists of two parts, the first proving again the superiority of the Peloponnesian war to all earlier wars and the second dealing with the causes of the Peloponnesian war. In the first part Thucydides proves the superiority of the Peloponnesian war to the Persian war which was the greatest of the earlier deeds and therewith to all earlier wars by showing that the Peloponnesian war surpassed the Persian war in regard to human sufferings. These sufferings were caused partly by men and partly by what we are

tempted to call natural catastrophes: earthquakes, eclipses of the sun, droughts and as their consequence famines, and last but not least the plague. It is at least as proper to speak of sufferings inflicted by human beings on the one hand and of "demonic (divine) things" on the other (II 64.2). The four demonic things independent of one another which Thucydides mentions might remind one of the four elements.[9] Eclipses of the sun are indeed not disasters but they may well be thought to announce disasters. The connection between the disasters of human origin and the other kind of disasters would then be supplied by divine rule: the gods punished Greece for the fratricidal war,[10] and they punished especially those Greeks who were responsible for the war. Accordingly, Thucydides turns immediately to the question of who was responsible for the war. His answer is that the Athenians forced the Spartans into war. The plague smote the Athenians and not the Spartans. Was it not Apollo who sent the plague which smote the Athenians (II 54.4–5)? The majority of the Greeks sympathized with the Spartans who appeared to be the liberators of Greece from Athenian tyranny (II 8.4–5). At any rate if one remembers what Thucydides had said earlier in praise of Sparta as distinguished from Athens, one will cease to find the concluding chapter of the Introduction disconcerting.

By starting from the most comprehensive judgments made by Thucydides himself we arrive at the conclusion that this great Athenian preferred the Spartan manner to the Athenian manner. This in itself is not paradoxical: there is no necessity that a man, and especially a great man, should identify himself with what prevails or what is most highly esteemed in his place of birth or with the ancestral. The judgments from which we have started are much less resplendent than the praise of Athens in the Funeral Speech, but the Funeral Speech expresses the sentiments of Pericles and not those of Thucydides. It is not Thucydides' fault if his readers are more impressed by the brilliant than by the unobtrusive. It is one of the differences between Sparta and Athens that no Spartan could

[9] Cf. Lucretius VI 1096ff.

[10] Aristophanes, *Peace* 204ff. Cf. the sequence of topics in III 86–89: a small Athenian expedition to Sicily; the plague smites the Athenians for the second time, and earthquakes; Aeolus and Hephaestus; the Spartans regarding an earthquake as an ill omen fail to invade Attica; natural consequences of earthquakes. The preceding section (III 69–85) dealing with the civil war (in Corcyra) is the only one in which "the divine law" is mentioned.

praise Sparta as well as Pericles praised Athens: Spartans were less eloquent or more laconic than the Athenians (cf. IV 84.2). On the other hand, no non-Spartan had a reason for praising Sparta as unqualifiedly as Pericles praised Athens, for all non-Spartans who were not enemies of Sparta, requesting Sparta's grudgingly given help, were compelled to express their dissatisfaction with the Spartan manner. Pericles' Funeral Speech, however, precisely serves the purpose of making everyone who listens—Athenian or foreigner —most satisfied with the Athenian manner and Athenian policy. All this goes to show that the absence of a praise of Sparta which is comparable in power to the praise of Athens in the Funeral Speech, does not prove that in Thucydides' view Sparta did not deserve higher praise than Athens. Thucydides does praise Pericles. But this praise is perfectly compatible with preferring Sparta to Pericles and his Athens. Pericles was by far superior to his successors by his ability to guide Athens safely in peace and through the war; Athens reached her greatest power under his rule (II 65.5–13). Yet Thucydides does not say of Periclean Athens as he says of Sparta that it succeeded in combining prosperity with moderation and still less that Athens succeeded in this thanks to Pericles. He does not even mention moderation (*sophrosyne*) in his eulogy of Pericles. Nor does his Pericles ever in any of his three speeches mention moderation. This revealing silence is not rendered ambiguous by the fact that both Cleon and the Athenian ambassadors to Melos use that word, for it is a sign of Pericles' superiority to his successors that he knows what he is talking about. The Funeral Speech, pronounced in obedience to a law, opens with a blame of that very law: Pericles lacks the moderation which prevents a man from regarding himself as wiser than the law (II 35; cf. I 84.3). This is to say nothing of the link between Pericles' speeches and the famous or infamous dialogue of the Athenians with the Melians in which the existence of a divine law limiting the desire for expansion is openly denied; Pericles admits without hesitation the quasi-tyrannical character of his Athens' rule over her subject cities (II 63.2; V 104–105.2). The Funeral Speech as a whole is a praise of the Athenian manner in contradistinction especially to the Spartan manner—of daring, permissiveness, and hope as opposed to caution, sternness, and fear. The fact that under Pericles, or thanks to Pericles, Athens became most powerful does not prove that under him, or thanks to him, it became "best." The polity established in 411 appeared to Thucydides to be the best that Athens had in his life-

time (VIII 97.2). The Periclean regime—a democracy in name but in fact the rule of the first man (II 65.9)—was inferior. It indeed saved democracy from itself and increased Athens' power and splendor beyond anything achieved earlier but it had to rely constitutionally on elusive chance: on the presence of a Pericles. A sound regime is one in which a fairly large group united by civic virtue of a fairly high level rules in broad daylight, in its own right. However great Pericles' merits may have been, his rule is inseparable from the Athenian democracy; it belongs to the Athenian democracy; the judgment on Pericles' rule must not be made in oblivion of the unsolid character of its foundation. A sound regime is a moderate regime dedicated to moderation.

All this is in accordance with our first impression according to which Thucydides' horizon is the horizon of the city. Every human being and every society is what it is by virtue of the highest to which it looks up. The city, if it is healthy, looks up, not to the laws which it can unmake as it made them, but to the unwritten laws, the divine law, the gods of the city. The city must transcend itself. The city can disregard the divine law; it can become guilty of *hybris* by deed and by speech: the Funeral Speech is followed by the plague, and the dialogue with the Melians is followed by the disaster in Sicily. This would seem to be the most comprehensive instruction which Thucydides silently conveys, the silent character of the conveyance being required by the chaste character of his piety.[11] If this is so, we shall cease to wonder why he is so silent about economic and cultural matters. Such matters were less important to him than, for instance, which army was in the possession of the battlefield after a battle; this was ultimately due to the fact that burial of one's dead is a most sacred duty; the army which had to abandon the battlefield was compelled to ask the enemy for permission to gather their dead and thus formally to concede defeat; this was a further reason why possession of the battlefield was so important.[12] When Thucydides fails to mention "the doubling or trebling of the tribute [of Athens' allies] in 425"—"the most notable omission in his narrative" from the point of view of the modern historian[13]—this may well be due to the fact that for Thucydides

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[11] Cf. Classen-Steup, *Thukydides* I (4th ed.; Berlin, 1897) pp. xliv–xlvi.

[12] Cf. IV 44 with Plutarch, *Nicias* 6.5–6.

[13] A.W. Gomme, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, I (Oxford, 1945) 26.

and for the cities, the payment of tribute as such, *i.e.* impairment of freedom, was much more important than the amount of the tribute; what is most important for the city is its freedom, the freedom endangered by the tyrant city of Athens: Sparta did not impose tribute on her allies but only her regime so favorable to stable freedom or an approximation to her regime (I 19). The general conclusion which we have drawn from Thucydides' explicit statements surely goes beyond these statements: we shall have to reconsider, in the light of the evidence supplied especially by his silence, our tentative suggestion as to what in his view transcends the city. Wherever that reconsideration will lead us, it cannot make doubtful the fact that the most important consideration concerns that which transcends the city or which is higher than the city; it does not concern things which are simply subordinate to the city.

## 3. *The Case for Athens: Daring, Progress, and the Arts*

The first subject of our reconsideration must be Thucydides' initial judgment according to which the Peloponnesian war was greater than the earlier wars, that it was the most memorable war. He selected this war not only because he happened to be contemporary with it but because he regarded it as singularly memorable. The greatness of this war is therefore not only the reason for the selection of his theme but is itself a theme, an important ingredient in his account of the war: one does not know the truth about the Peloponnesian war if one does not know that it was the greatest war. The proof of the initial assertion seems to be supplied by the few lines in which Thucydides shows that the Peloponnesian war surpassed by far the Persian war by virtue of the sufferings which it caused. But perhaps there was another war which caused greater sufferings than the Persian war. And perhaps the greatness of a war is not merely established by the amount of suffering which it causes. The fact that an author as terse as Thucydides wrote about nineteen chapters in order to prove his contention that the Peloponnesian war was the greatest or most memorable war shows that that war had another competitor than the Persian war. That competitor was the Trojan war. A generation after him, Isocrates still maintained the view that the Trojan war was the greatest war.[14]

[14] *Panathenaicus* 76–83; *Helen* 49.

The Peloponnesian war was the greatest motion because it affected all Greece and a part of the barbarians, "so to speak the largest part of mankind."[15] It was, so to speak, the first universal motion. It was the most memorable war because it was memorable, so to speak, to all men. Its universality is not impaired by the fact that not all barbarians were affected by it; it is sufficiently guaranteed by the fact that all Greece and some barbarians were affected by it because of the special importance of the Greeks for the Greek Thucydides. For the Peloponnesian war to be the greatest motion, it is of decisive importance that the Greeks, *i.e.* the leading Greek cities, were at their peak when the war began: the Peloponnesian war is the climactic war. Being both universal and climactic, it is the complete war, the absolute war. It is *the* war, war writ large:[16] the universal character of war will be more visible, and there will be more of war in the greatest war than in any other, smaller war. The Peloponnesian war is that singular event which reveals fully, in an unsurpassable manner, for all times, the nature of war.

Thucydides is under an obligation to prove his contention that the Peloponnesian war is the absolute war, the universal and climactic war. The universal war requires communication among all cities and, so to speak, among all countries, especially communication overseas; it presupposes the existence of powerful and wealthy cities. He must then prove that these requirements were fulfilled to a much lesser degree in the past than in his own time; he must show "the weakness of the ancients" (I 3.1). He matches his suggestion regarding the universality of the war ("so to speak the largest part of mankind") by a suggestion regarding the most ancient antiquity (as distinguished from the most ancient antiquity of which one knows by tradition—cf. I 4 beg.), regarding the simply first things. He suggests that it is difficult to arrive at an opinion backed by evidence about that earlier event which could be thought to challenge the supremacy of the Peloponnesian war, *i.e.* the Trojan war, and the still more ancient things (I 1.2): he makes us wonder whether anything can be known regarding the most ancient things. Yet since the development from that antiquity of which we have some direct knowledge to the present is, on the whole, a progress in security, power, and wealth, it becomes sufficiently clear that at

[15] I 1.2; cf. II 41.4.

[16] Cf. Plato, *Republic* 368e7–8.

the beginning there was unlimited insecurity, weakness, and poverty. The reason for this was the unlimited rule in the beginning of unrest, of motion. Very slowly and sporadically man found some rest. During the periods of rest and security—periods which lasted much longer than the periods of motion alternating with them—power and wealth were built up. Power and wealth were built up not in and through motion but in and through rest (I 2, 7, 8.3, 12, 13.1). Rest, not motion, peace, not war, is good. The process reached its peak in Sparta and Athens at the outbreak of the Peloponnesian war. The Peloponnesian war, the greatest motion, follows on the greatest rest, embodies the greatest rest. Only for this reason can it be the greatest motion. Therefore the understanding of the Peloponnesian war which makes manifest the nature of war makes manifest also the nature of peace: Thucydides' work enables one to understand not only all past and future wars but the past and future things simply (I 1.3 end, 22.4).

The rise from original and universal insecurity, weakness, and poverty to security, power, and wealth became in certain places the rise from original and universal barbarism to what one may call Greekness, the union of freedom and love of beauty. The very name "Greeks" is recent. So is the Greek way of life. Originally the Greeks lived like barbarians. Originally the Greeks were barbarians. In the most ancient antiquity there were no Greeks (I 3, 6). In the initial universal unrest or motion all men were barbarians. Rest, long periods of rest, were the conditions for the emergence of Greekness. Greekness is late and rare; it is the exception. Just as humanity divides itself into Greeks and barbarians, Greekness in its turn has two poles, Sparta and Athens. The fundamental opposition of motion and rest returns on the level of Greekness; Sparta cherishes rest whereas Athens cherishes motion. The peak of Sparta and Athens was reached at the outbreak of the Peloponnesian war. In that greatest motion, power, wealth, and Greekness, built up during a long rest, are used and used up. Greeks and barbarians, the elements and the gods, seem to have conspired to do the utmost damage to Greekness (I 23.1–3). The decline begins. The greatest rest is that in which Greekness reaches its peak; it finds its culmination, its end in the greatest motion. The greatest motion weakens, endangers, nay destroys, not only power and wealth but Greekness as well. It leads soon to that unrest within the city, the *stasis*, which is re-barbarization. The most savage and murderous barbarism,

which was slowly overcome by the building up of Greekness, reappears in the midst of Greece: Thracian mercenaries in the pay of Athens murder the children attending a Greek school. Thucydides envisages the ruin of Sparta and Athens: just as his contemporaries have looked at the remains of barbarians on Apollo's island, he has seen with his mind's eye the ruins of Sparta and Athens (I 8.1, 10.1–2). He was familiar with the thought that "by nature all things will eventually also decline," for he makes his Pericles express that thought (II 64.3). It is not in vain that he reports about the new powers in the north, the great Odrysian empire and, above all, the amazing progress of Macedon under king Archelaus (II 97.5–6, 100.2).

The Peloponnesian war, a singular event, is distinguished from all other singular events by the fact that it is the climactic Greek war. In studying that war, one sees the Greeks at their peak in motion; one sees the beginning of the descent. The peak of Greekness is the peak of humanity. The Peloponnesian war and what it implies exhausts the possibilities of man. Just as one cannot understand that greatest motion without understanding the greatest rest, one cannot understand Greekness without understanding barbarism. All human life moves between the poles of war and peace and between the poles of barbarism and Greekness. By studying the Peloponnesian war Thucydides grasps the limits of all human things. By studying this singular event against the background of the ancient things he grasps the nature of all human things. It is for this reason that his work is a possession for all times.

Thucydides was compelled to prove the supremacy of the Peloponnesian war by bringing to light the weakness of the ancients because men believed in the supremacy of the Trojan war. The Trojan war owed its renown to Homer. By questioning the supremacy of the Trojan war Thucydides questions the authority of Homer. By proving the weakness of the ancients he proves that the account given by the ancients was not true in the decisive respect: he proves the weakness of the ancients, and in particular of Homer, in regard to wisdom. By proving that the Greeks who fought the Peloponnesian war were at their peak, he proves that his wisdom is superior to Homer's wisdom. But for Thucydides' inquiry, the glamor of antiquity—a glamor made immortal by Homer—would always outshine the solid superiority of Thucydides' time. Thucydides confronts us with the choice between Homeric and Thucydidean

wisdom. He engages in a contest with Homer. Homer lived long after the Trojan war; this alone makes him a questionable witness to the Trojan war. Above all, Homer is a poet. Poets magnify and adorn and they tell fabulous stories; they thus conceal the truth about human beings and human nature. Homeric wisdom reveals the character of human life by presenting deeds and speeches which are magnified and adorned. Thucydidean wisdom reveals the character of human life by presenting deeds and speeches which are not magnified and adorned. The Greek princes followed Agamemnon to Troy not, as the poets suggest, out of graciousness but out of fear or compulsion. The strange course of the Trojan war is to be explained prosaically by the Greeks' lack of money.[17] Thucydides' prosaic treatment of the Trojan war (to say nothing of his treatment of the Peloponnesian war) foreshadows Cervantes' treatment of knight errantry.

The new wisdom is then superior to the old wisdom as wisdom. Yet it is precisely by trusting Homer that Thucydides succeeds in bringing to light the truth about the Trojan war (I 10.1–3). Above all, Homer was admired because he revealed the truth which he knew in a way that is most pleasing. Thucydides does not seem to deny that his wisdom too will be pleasing: "The non-fabulous character of my account will perhaps appear to be less pleasing to the ear." It will not appear less pleasing than Homer's poetry to those whose ears have been properly trained.[18] Thucydides' severe and austere wisdom too is music: inspired by a Muse, if by a higher and therefore severer and more austere Muse than Homer's. In a word, it is perhaps more enlightening to see Thucydides as engaged in a contest with Homer than as a scientific historian: human wisdom rather than anything else is the core of Greekness.

Thucydides deals in the Introduction to his work first with the superiority of the Peloponnesian war to all earlier wars (I 1–19) and then with the superiority of his kind of account to all earlier accounts (I 20–22). Thucydides is concerned not only with the war but also with his *logos*. The progress in wisdom achieved by him is akin to the progress of which he speaks most comprehensively in his "archeology." His age could boast of a progress beyond the whole past in experience, craft, and knowledge, especially in Athens (I

[17] I 3.3; 9.1, 3; 10.3; 11.1, 3; 21.1; 22.4.
[18] Cf. Cicero, *Orator* 39.

49.1–3, 70.2, 71.2–3). His archeology is in perfect agreement with what his Pericles says in the Funeral Speech about the achievements of his generation as compared with those of the preceding generations (II 36.1–3) and about the questionable character of Homeric wisdom (II 41.4). However highly Thucydides may have thought of Sparta, moderation, and the divine law, his thought belongs altogether to innovating Athens rather than to old-fashioned Sparta. The conventional opening of his work ("Thucydides the Athenian") carries a non-conventional message.

Thucydides makes one wonder whether anything can be known about the most ancient things. Yet the oldest things include the things which are at all times, and it is with things of this kind that the possession for all times is concerned. Thucydides sees human nature as the stable ground of all its effects—of war and peace, barbarism and Greekness, civic concord and discord, sea-power and land-power, the few and the many. The nature of man cannot be understood without some understanding of nature as a whole. War being a kind of motion and peace being a kind of rest, they are only particular forms of the universal, all-pervasive interplay of motion and rest. Accordingly Thucydides is concerned with things other than human as well as with human things, and not only with such non-human things as directly affected the Peloponnesian war, as the plague and earthquakes. He speaks of land making inroads on the sea and of the sea making inroads on the land and suggests natural causes of these happenings (II 102.3–4, III 89). He suggests a natural explanation of Odysseus' Charybdis (IV 24.5). What his wily Demosthenes seems to have called "the nature of the place," he calls "the place itself" (IV 3.2, 4.3). Most striking is his account of the plague—a mighty change, hence motion—which surpassed all remembered earlier destructions of human beings anywhere as much as the Peloponnesian war surpassed all earlier wars (II 47.3, 48.3, 53.2). Instead of speculating on whether the opposition of sea and land (and hence of sea-power and land-power and therefore in particular of Athens and Sparta) must be understood ultimately in the light of the opposition of motion and rest, we reconsider the relation of motion and rest to progress and decline on the one hand, to Sparta and Athens on the other. However much progress may owe to rest, progress itself is motion. Besides, not only rest but also motion, in particular war, leads to power and wealth (I 15.1–2, 18.2–3, 19). Finally, as some of Thucydides' characters contend,

rest is ruinous to craft and knowledge, whereas the opposite is true of motion (I 71.3, VI 18.6). Yet it is also true that the statesman who has acquired knowledge, like Pericles, as opposed to the fickle multitude, represents superhuman rest in the midst of human motion —rest confronting, understanding, and mastering motion (I 140.1, II 61.2, 65.4). Thucydides' work could be written because he found rest in the midst of the greatest motion (V 26.5). The highest things which we find in Athens are akin to rest or are the highest form of rest. For it is not so much motion as a certain kind of interplay of motion and rest which is responsible for the ancient poverty, weakness, and barbarism, and it is not rest but another kind of interplay of motion and rest which is responsible for present wealth, power, and Greekness. However much all things may always be in motion, the highest at which human thought arrives—motion and rest—is stable. The highest form of rest is not, like the form represented by Sparta, opposed to daring but presupposes the utmost daring: in the olden times men had no daring (I 17). The highest form of rest can therefore not be coordinated with moderation.

If motion and rest are the most ancient things, they will transcend or comprise the gods. From Homer's Shield of Achilles we might learn that the gods are more visible in war than in peace. In the war which was more war than any other war, in the greatest war, of which Thucydides studied the most minute details, he found no trace of the gods: are they likely to have been more effective in smaller wars and in particular in the Trojan war? Or is not precisely this the core of Homer's magnifying and adorning, that he traces the Trojan war and many of its incidents to the gods? Will our insight into the barbarism and the weakness of the ancients, and in particular their weakness regarding wisdom, not affect our view about the gods and the divine things which are decidedly ancient?[19] Two men stand out in Thucydides' account of antiquity, Minos and Agamemnon. He says nothing of Minos' ancestry and he speaks only in a somewhat garbled fashion of Agamemnon's ancestry.[20] His archeology leaves one wondering whether the gods could have been anything for him but immensely magnified barbarians of the remote past. If this should prove to be correct, the divine law to which he

[19] Cf. Euripides, *Helen* 13–14.

[20] I 4 and 9.1–2. Cf. the first mention of a god in I 13.6 (cf. I 8.1) with I 126.3–5. Consider II 68.3–5 and 102.5–6.

refers so powerfully cannot be a law laid down by any god; its origin and hence its essence becomes altogether obscure. If however the divine law properly understood is the interplay of motion and rest, one must study his work in the light of the question of how that divine law is related to the divine law in the ordinary understanding.

Thucydides belongs in a sense to Periclean Athens—to the Athens in which Anaxagoras and Protagoras taught and were persecuted on the ground of impiety.[21] The Funeral Speech in which his Pericles sets forth what his Athens stands for is silent about the divine law. His Pericles speaks only of the unwritten laws or, more precisely, of such unwritten laws as have been laid down for the benefit of the human beings who suffer injustice; transgression of these laws leads to disgrace at Athens—nothing is said to the effect that it is followed by divine retribution. He is silent about the gods or the strictly superhuman. He does mention sacrifices: when speaking of the relaxations from toil which are provided by the city (II 37.3, 38.1; cf. Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 1160a19–25). In the sole reference to the superhuman which occurs in any of his three speeches, he says that one must bear the superhuman (like the plague) "of necessity" whereas one must bear what the enemy inflicts "bravely"; he never says that one must revere the superhuman (II 64.2). The only Periclean reference to a god—a reference to the monetary value of the image of the goddess (Athena)—occurs characteristically in the center of a Thucydidean summary of a Periclean speech (II 13.5). Thucydides' argument in favor of Sparta, of moderation, of the divine law—important as it is—is only a part of his teaching. The praise of Sparta—the highest praise occurring within the archeology—thought through to its conclusion would lead to the highest praise of the most ancient antiquity.[22] This whole line of thought is contradicted by the explicit and opening thesis of the archeology as a whole—the thesis asserting the supremacy of the Peloponnesian war—and all that that thesis implies. The contradiction corresponds to the opposition between old-fashioned Sparta and innovating Athens, between admiration for antiquity and admiration for the present as the peak. Only the former—the equation of the good with the old or ancestral—seems to be in

[21] Plutarch, *Nicias* 23.2–3.

[22] Cf. the *ek palaitatou* in I 18.1 with I 1.2.

agreement with the view of the city as city. Yet the city thinks differently at different times. We learn from Thucydides that the admiration for antiquity, just as the admiration for moderation, is at home in peace whereas men tend to regard every war in which they are engaged, every present war, as the greatest (I 21.2), perhaps because during war the present calls for the supreme effort. Thucydides' bald assertion regarding the supremacy of the Peloponnesian war is then in accordance with a natural prejudice and therefore not offensive. But it so happens that what in many cases is merely a prejudice is in the case of the Peloponnesian war a demonstrable truth which when demonstrated eradicates forever the much more powerful prejudice in favor of antiquity, the prejudice which is at home in peace, when men live securely and protectedly. The view which belongs to war, the admiration for the present and all this implies, so far from being simply wrong, is truer than the opposite view.[23] War is a "violent teacher": it teaches men not only to act violently but also about violence and therewith about the truth. War is a violent teacher not only of everyone except Thucydides but also of Thucydides himself. Taught by that teacher Thucydides presents the war as it unfolds. Generally speaking, he lets us see the war at each point as it could be seen at the time; he shows us the war from different viewpoints. In doing this he could not help presenting his own conversion from the peace time view to the war time view or his most advanced education. The result of this innermost process animating his work is the classic political history. In his work we observe the genesis of political history, political history *in statu nascendi*, still visibly connected with its origin. Thucydides is concerned above everything else with war, more generally with foreign policy; the overriding concern with domestic politics, with the good order within the city, he leaves to the moderate citizens (cf. IV 28.5).

By the process animating Thucydides' work we do not mean then a change of his thought of which he was not necessarily aware and which has left traces in his work of which he was not necessarily aware. We rather have in mind that deliberate movement of his thought between two different points of view which expresses itself in the deliberate dual treatment of the same subject from different points of view, for instance of the Athenian tyrannicides.

[23] Consider VI 70.1.

He devotes the highest praise to the justice and goodness of that noble Spartan Brasidas (IV 81) and then asserts that Brasidas was decidedly opposed to peace between Sparta and Athens because of the honor which he derived from his victories (V 16.1). The first judgment is that of a man who surveys the whole war; the second judgment brings out how Brasidas appeared at the time to the peace parties, especially to the peace party in Sparta.[24] Not unlike his teacher, Thucydides is as flexible as he is austere. His seeing and showing things from a variety of points of view which he does not explicitly identify leads us naturally to the speeches of his characters through which he shows things as they appear to a named individual or city at a given time. The writing of those speeches thus appears to be only a special case of Thucydides' general procedure. Every speech is a part—a part of a peculiar kind—of Thucydides' speech.

## 4. *The Speeches of the Actors and the Speech of Thucydides*

We must try to find out what particular kind of Thucydides' speech is constituted by the speeches of his characters. After having completed his proof of the superiority of the Peloponnesian war to all earlier wars or rather of the present to antiquity, he comes to speak of the difficulty attending the discovery of the truth concerning antiquity.[25] That truth is concealed by time. But distance in time is not the only reason why men are mistaken; local distance is also of some importance. "Human beings" or "the many"[26] are not deterred by these difficulties from having firmly held thoughts about the past and about foreign things. These thoughts became known to Thucydides through men's speeches. The truth brought to light by him about antiquity or, which is the same thing, about the superiority of the Peloponnesian war to all earlier wars, will be seen to be the truth by those who look at things by starting from the deeds

[24] Cf. V 14 (the reason why both Athens and Sparta favored peace) with 15 (the reason for the Spartans' taking the initiative toward peace).

[25] I 20 beginning. The passage makes clear that the whole preceding discussion deals with the ancient things, either directly or indirectly; it deals with them indirectly by showing the superiority in strength of recent times to antiquity.

[26] I 20.1, 3; cf. I 140.1.

(facts) themselves, *i.e.* not from what people say or the speeches (cf. also I 11 end). Immediately after having spoken of his treatment of the ancient things, he turns to his treatment of the Peloponnesian war; what he says about the bulk of his work is shorter than what he says about his archeology. The Peloponnesian war is not difficult of access because of temporal distance and not altogether difficult of access because of local distance; hence in this case the speeches, *i.e.* the reports about the deeds, would seem to be no obstacle to the discovery of the truth. It is in this delicate manner that Thucydides opens our minds to the thought that "human beings" may be as profoundly mistaken about what is going on before their eyes as about happenings in the remotest past in the remotest countries. The first difficulty concerns the speeches delivered before the outbreak of the Peloponnesian war and during that war. Some of the speeches Thucydides himself had heard; but it was difficult for him to remember the exact wording; the difficulty of knowing the exact wording was, to say the least, no less in the case of those speeches for the knowledge of which he had to rely on reports by others. He decided therefore to write the speeches himself, keeping as close as possible to the gist of what the speakers had said—writing in each case how the speaking man or body of men "seemed" to him to have said to the highest degree what was appropriate in the circumstances about the subject at hand. (This implies, I believe, that he abstracted from the defects of diction from which a given speaker might have suffered but did not endow any speaker with qualities of understanding and choosing which he lacked.) As for the deeds done in the war, the "how it seemed" to him did not enter at all in his narrative.[27] What Thucydides says about the speeches is surrounded on both sides by references to "deeds."[28]

The only thing which seems to emerge with sufficient clarity from Thucydides' statement about the speeches is that what "seemed" to Thucydides is more present in the speeches than in his account of the deeds. He does not make clear why he wrote the speeches at all; he merely makes clear how, after having decided to write the speeches, he brought them as close to the truth as possible. It goes

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[27] This must be taken with a grain of salt; cf. II 17.2, III 89.5, VI 55.3, VII 87.5, VIII 56.3, 64.5, 87.4 (cf. *ibid.* 3 beginning); cf. also I 1.3; 9.1, 3; 10.4.

[28] Cf. also I 21 end with I 23 beginning.

without saying that the question of why he wrote the speeches cannot be answered by reference to Homer's practice. Some points may be learned through consideration of the immediate context of Thucydides' statement. However great the value of the speeches may be, the deeds are more trustworthy than the speeches. Yet the deeds became known to Thucydides partly through speeches, *i.e.* through the reports of eyewitnesses; these reports were vitiated to some extent by the bad memory and the partiality of the reporters (I 22.3). It is reasonable to assume that not all speakers of the speeches recorded within the work were free from these failings and that Thucydides appropriately preserved this characteristic when he wrote the speeches which he ascribed to those speakers. He divides the subject matter of his work into the speeches delivered both prior to the war and during the war and the deeds done during the war. Since he devotes considerable space to the deeds done prior to the war, he thus draws our attention to the fact that in an important respect the speeches simply precede the deeds. The speeches which simply precede the deeds concern the causes of the deeds, men's plans and intentions: only speeches can make manifest the immanifest (III 42.2). They concern above all the causes of the war, the causes openly "spoken," as distinguished from the truest cause which remains unspoken or unavowed (I 23.4): the speeches may be deceptive not only because of the bad memory and the partiality of the speakers; they may also be meant to deceive. Of the speeches Thucydides says that it was difficult to remember the exact wording and hence he did not remember it, whereas of the deeds he says that he found out the truth about them with toil. When he denies that his book is necessarily unpleasing, he may have thought of the speeches in the first place.

What do the speeches achieve that the most perfect report about the speeches could not have achieved? Such a report would have revealed to us the intention of the speech, the arguments used by the speaker to support that intention as well as those used to refute the opponents, the order of the arguments as well as the weight which the speaker assigned to each argument; it would have included a description of the abilities, the manners and the present disposition of the speaker as well as of the disposition of the audience; it would have told us whether or to what extent the speech of the speaker agreed with his deeds if the latter did not become known to us through the narrative. What we would still miss is the presence of the speaker: we would not see him by hearing him; we

would not be exposed to him, affected by him, perhaps bewitched by him. The most perfect Thucydidean reports about the speeches would be parts of Thucydides' speech like all its other parts; we would not see Thucydides' speech in its peculiarity; and we would be exposed only to Thucydides. For what distinguishes Thucydides' speech from the speeches of his characters? The speeches are partial in a double sense. They deal with a particular situation or difficulty, and they are spoken from the point of view of one or the other side of the warring cities or contending parties. Thucydides' narrative corrects this partiality: Thucydides' speech is impartial in the double sense. It is not partisan and it is comprehensive since it deals, to say the least, with the whole war. By integrating the political speeches into the true and comprehensive speech, he makes visible the fundamental difference between the political speech and the true speech. No political speech ever serves the purpose of revealing the truth as such; every political speech serves a particular political purpose, and it attempts to achieve it by exhorting or dehorting, by accusing or exculpating, by praising or blaming, by imploring or refusing. The speeches abound therefore with praise and blame, whereas Thucydides' speech is reserved. The speakers answer questions—and not merely questions of the moment but the most fundamental and permanent questions concerning human action—which Thucydides does not answer, and they do so in a most persuasive manner. Thus the reader is almost irresistibly tempted to agree with the speaker and to believe that Thucydides, who after all wrote the speech, must have used the speaker as his mouthpiece. Thucydides helps us indeed in judging of the wisdom of the speeches, not only by his account of the deeds but also by giving us his judgment of the wisdom, not indeed of the speeches but of the speakers, yet he does not do this in all cases and, above all, in no case is his explicit judgment, be it of men or of policies, complete. In fact, precisely the speeches more than anything else convey to us his judgment of the speakers and not only of the speakers.

The Corcyreans in addressing the Athenians seem to commit an "unconscious contradiction": "Corcyra will have it both ways—'the war is anyhow coming' and 'this action will not involve a *casus belli*.'"[29] Yet an action desirable or necessary with a view to an

[29] Gomme, *loc. cit.* 169.

expected war, even if the action is regarded as provocative by the prospective enemy, does not necessarily constitute a breach of the treaty with that power, and the Corcyreans consider no other *casus belli* than the breach of such a treaty. It is more important however to take cognizance of the fact that a contradiction committed unconsciously by Thucydides' speakers is not necessarily committed unconsciously by Thucydides: it reveals the predicament of the speaker and is meant to reveal it. The speech may also reveal how the speaker overcomes the predicament in which he finds himself. The Spartans claim to wage the war for the freedom of all cities against the tyrant city Athens. The cities subject to Athens or allied with her were however bound to her by treaties; to switch from the Athenian alliance to the Spartan alliance, especially at a time when the Athenians were hard-pressed, was thought to be not only unjust but also dishonorable (III 9). Accordingly, when the Spartan Brasidas attempts to induce the Acanthians to forsake their alliance with Athens, he does not even allude to the fact of that alliance; he tacitly conveys the view that a city cannot be allied to Athens except under duress. He cannot entirely dispense with threats of what he will do to the Acanthians if they do not comply with his request, but he threatens them with no more than that he will force them to be free; this use of force will be perfectly just because the Acanthians' lack of freedom endangers the freedom of all other cities or the good common to all cities. Still, the Acanthians might fear that after having liberated the cities at present enslaved by Athens, the Spartans will enslave them in turn. Brasidas refutes this fear by assuring the Acanthians that he has bound the Spartan government by the greatest oaths that it will not attempt anything of this kind (IV 85–87). Just as Brasidas' speech solves in a masterly manner by speech the whole problem of Greek politics, Hermocrates' speech to the all-Sicilian assembly in Gela (IV 59–64) is a masterpiece of statesmanly foresight. Foreseeing many years before the event the Athenian attempt to conquer Sicily, he tries to put a stop to all intra-Sicilian frictions in order to unite the Sicilians against the common enemy, their enemy "by nature." Sicily is indeed divided "by nature" into Dorians and Ionians, and the Athenians are Ionians; but the Athenian invasion will be prompted, not by racial hatred, but by desire for the wealth of all Sicily. What enables Hermocrates to see the danger from afar, and to suggest a remedy in time, is his understanding of human nature; he does

not blame the Athenians for their aggression since in his view the desire for aggrandizement is natural to man as man regardless of what conventions or words ("names") may make one believe. Yet, as he is forced to admit, what unites the Sicilians is "name" rather than "nature" (race),[30] and, as he is not forced to admit in the present circumstances, if the desire for aggrandizement is natural to man as man or at any rate to the city as city, powerful and nearby Syracuse is as much to be feared by her weaker neighbors as more powerful but far away Athens. The difficulty which Brasidas overcomes by claiming to trust in the greatest oaths of the highest Spartan authority cannot be overcome by Hermocrates who is compelled to appeal to nature. Continuing to disregard entirely the disposition of the audience while however assuming its being composed of tolerably decent men, we may find that the greatest difficulty had to be faced by Alcibiades in his speech in Sparta. Having been accused by the Athenians of a capital crime connected with shocking acts of impiety and having fled to Sparta, he wishes to revenge himself on Athens by showing the Spartans how they can bring down their and his enemy. He has to overcome two powerful prejudices against himself. In the first place, as an Athenian politician he had been notorious as an enemy of Sparta. Above all, he had just betrayed or was about to betray his own city to its greatest enemies. He disposes of the two objections by one and the same answer: he was against the Spartans because they had wronged him; he turns now against the Athenians because they have wronged him (VI 89–92). Being conscious of his unique ability as well as of his renown for it, and not being bound to any particular city because of his infinite versatility, he is not compelled to avoid self-contradiction by having recourse to oaths. He does contradict himself regarding his and his family's posture toward democracy: the Athenian regime which they managed is not truly democratic, and it is democratic but they could not change it because of the war (VI 89.4–6); but both answers serve his purpose equally well.

Thucydides gives an indirect characterization of the Athenian democracy through the speech of the Syracusan demagogue Athenagoras (VI 36–40). Reports had reached Syracuse from many sides to the effect that the Athenian invasion fleet was approaching, but it took a long time before the reports were believed even by a

[30] Cf. also VI 77.1 end, 79.2, 80.3.

minority of the Syracusans. After Hermocrates, who was of course sure of the truth of the reports, had addressed the Syracusan assembly, Athenagoras opposed him, dismissing the reports as an inept move made by the Syracusan oligarchs to frighten the multitude and thus to make themselves masters of the city. In Athenagoras' view the Athenians are much too clever to embark on such a foolhardy and hopeless enterprise as the conquest of Sicily. The only thing that will put an end to the subversive activities of the Syracusan oligarchic youth is democratic terror. This terror is justified because there is no sound or respectable reason for opposing democracy—the regime which is both fair and wise: it gives a more than equal share in the common good to the deserving men among the rich, and the multitude is the best judge of the wisdom of the speakers. Thucydides has entrusted to Athenagoras the clearest and most comprehensive exposition of the democratic view which occurs in his work, for the ringing sentences of the Funeral Speech describe not democracy as such, but the Athenian regime.[31] This fact alone must make his speech an object of the greatest interest to us. As is shown by the deeds, the Syracusan democrat was mistaken at least to the extent that he did not know and understand the Athenian democracy: the Athenian invading force did come with the full approval of the Athenian multitude and it would have succeeded in its mission if Athenagoras' counterparts in Athens had not recalled Alcibiades from the invading force for reasons not dissimilar to those of Athenagoras, with the full approval of the Athenian multitude. Athenagoras did not know the Athenian multitude because he was unable to look beyond the party strife within Syracuse; he lacked the understanding and even the information that Hermocrates possessed. The Athenian democracy was a special kind of democracy, an imperial democracy exercising quasi-tyrannical rule over her so-called allies. Even Cleon and precisely Cleon speaks of the difficulty—he can afford to call it impossibility —of combining empire with democracy. Cleon could preserve this combination to some extent because he was able to imitate, or to ape, Pericles.[32] Observations like these do not go to the root of the matter; they do not touch what Aristotle would call the matter of Athenian democracy, the nature of the Athenian people (cf. I

[31] Cf. especially II 37.1 with II 65.9.

[32] III 37.1–2; 38 beginning (cf. II 61.2).

70.9). At the end of the address to the troops before a naval battle, the Peloponnesian commanders tell them that none of them will have an excuse for acting as a coward and if anyone tries to act cowardly he will be properly punished, while the brave ones will be honored properly. The parallel to this conclusion in the address of the Athenian commander Phormio is his statement that the troops are about to engage in a great contest: they will either make an end to the Peloponnesians' hope for naval victory or else bring the fear regarding the sea nearer home to the Athenians.[33] The Peloponnesians appeal to the self-interest of the individual; the Athenian appeals only to what is at stake for the city. There were no doubt additional reasons—reasons connected with the particular situation —for this difference between the two speeches; yet this does not do away with the fact that Thucydides' Phormio, if contrasted with his Peloponnesian antagonists, *i.e.* unconsciously, confirms the view explicitly stated by the Corinthians that the Athenians were singularly public-spirited: the Athenian uses his body as if it were the most external, the most foreign thing to him in order to sacrifice it for his city, and he uses his innermost thought, most peculiar to him, in order to do something for his city (I 70.6).

Thucydides has presented the nameless Athenian perhaps most powerfully but surely most gracefully through the speech of the Athenians at Sparta (I 72–78). Those Athenians happened to be in Sparta on business of their city when the Corinthians and other Spartan allies attempted to incite Sparta to war against Athens by complaining to the Spartan assembly about Athenian encroachments. Having heard of this anti-Athenian action they requested and received permission of the Spartans to address the Spartan assembly in order to counteract the effects of the Corinthian charges. The speech constitutes an action on behalf of their city which they undertook without having been commissioned to do it by their city. This is the only speech of this kind in Thucydides' work. The speech is unique for still another reason which concerns Thucydides' speeches in general. It is the only speech preceded by a summary, given by Thucydides in his own name, of the gist of the speech—a summary which to some extent agrees literally with what the speakers themselves say at the beginning of their speech about the

[33] II 87.9, 89.10. Cf. VI 69.3. Phormio addresses the Athenians alone, not any allies: II 88.3.

purport of their speech.[34] The most important difference between Thucydides' summary and the opening remark of the speech itself is this: Thucydides says that the Athenians wished to show how great their city was in regard to power; the Athenians say that they wish to make manifest that their city is worthy of mention, or is important. How then do they reveal the power of Athens? No part of their speech is devoted to this subject. The main subjects of the speech are these: (1) Athens has well deserved of Greece in the Persian war (73.2–74); (2) Athens cannot be blamed for either the acquisition of her empire or for the way in which she manages it (75–77). Since the Athenian action in the Persian war laid the foundation for the empire, the speech can be said to be devoted to the justification of the Athenian empire in contradistinction to the exhibition of Athenian power. It is true that by barely mentioning the Athenian empire they would point to Athenian power, but since everyone present knew the existence of the Athenian empire, even their worst enemy could not say that they showed how great the power of their city was, let alone that they boasted of their power. Their worst enemy, a Spartan ephor, does say that they praised themselves but he finds that praise rightly in what they said about Athens' merit in the Persian war.[35] It is indeed in the part of their speech devoted to the Persian war that they come closest to speaking explicitly of Athens' power. The Athenians, they say, saved Greece by contributing the largest number of ships, a most intelligent commander (Themistocles), and the most daring zeal. But what made Athens worthy of empire is not the large navy but the zeal and intelligence shown at Salamis (74.1–2, 75.1). These qualities—the superior intelligence of their leaders and the daring zeal of the people—, they intimate, and not the navy, are the core of Athens' power. Thucydides himself tells us that at the time of Salamis, Sparta was much more powerful than Athens (I 18.2) in all respects other than these qualities. Or, as his Pericles puts it, at the time of Salamis when they had abandoned their city, the Athenians had so to speak nothing but their intelligence and daring, those virile qualities which created Athenian power rather than that Athenian power had created these qualities (I 143.5, 144.4). By

[34] The speech which comes closest to the Athenians' speech in this respect is that by Phormio (II 88–89).

[35] I 86.1; cf. I 73.2–3.

speaking, *i.e.* acting, as they do, the Athenians in Sparta show forth the mainstay of Athens' present power. To this extent they silently confirm what the Corinthians had said to the Spartan assembly about the profound difference between the Athenians and all others. But the Corinthians had inferred from this difference that the Athenians are therefore a menace to all others and especially to the Spartans. The Athenians must deny the soundness of this inference. They do this in an extraordinary manner. They trace their threatening power to compulsion: they were compelled to build their empire by fear, by honor, and by interest; in ceding to that compulsion they did what the Spartans, nay what all other men would have done in their place: they ceded to human nature. What distinguishes their exercise of imperial power from that of all others is the singular fairness in their dealings with their subjects. It is above all by the amazing frankness with which they defend the Athenian acquisition of empire that they reveal Athenian power, for only the most powerful can afford to utter the principles which they utter. The charge that Athens threatens Sparta is treated by them with contempt: the Athenians just as the Spartans have never committed the mistake of starting a war with a power equal to their own; all differences between Athens on the one hand and Sparta and her allies on the other can and should be settled peacefully, according to treaty. One has spoken of the provocative irony of the Athenians while asserting that "quite clearly Thucydides did not think that it was the Athenian aim to be provocative, but the contrary."[36] The speech is better described as both fastidious and frank. Thucydides knew as well as Socrates that it is easy to praise Athens before an Athenian audience.[37] What the Athenians did in Sparta was not easy. Thucydides is at least as fastidious as these Athenians. One cannot say of him however that he did not have his reticences.

In order to appreciate fully the sole speech of the Athenians in Sparta, one must also contrast it with the sole speech of the Spartans in Athens (IV 17–20).[38] Under Demosthenes' inspiring leadership

[36] Gomme, *loc. cit.* 254.

[37] Plato, *Menexenus* 235d.

[38] The other counterpart of the sole speech of the Spartans in Athens which was delivered when the Spartans apprehended the loss of three hundred men, is a possible second speech of the Athenians in Sparta after the disastrous plague (II 59.2). The Spartans would have made peace if the Athenians had listened to their request; Pericles would have prevented a peace even if the Spartans had listened to the Athenian ambassadors' request.

the Athenians had succeeded in defeating the Spartans at Pylos and in cutting off a considerable Spartan detachment on the island of Sphacteria. The Spartan authorities, despairing of relieving that detachment and anxious to avoid at all costs its capture or destruction, send an embassy to Athens to start negotiations for peace. The ambassadors cannot help referring in their speech to their present predicament or the Athenians' great success. They do it by speaking of the Athenians' good luck: if you act wisely you will gain honor and glory in addition to the good luck; they slyly suggest that the Athenians' victory did not bring them honor and glory. They warn them not to trust that luck will always be on their side, for in war luck is of utmost importance; if the Athenians do not make peace now, and fail in their enterprises afterward, they will be thought to owe their present success to luck and not to their strength and intelligence (17.4–18.5). In this underhanded and grudging manner they do admit the fact, which they denied in the preceding sentences, that the Athenians owe their present success to their virtue. Their lack of frankness and of pride is not redeemed by graciousness. Their king Archidamus had claimed that they alone because of their moderation do not become insolent in success and that they cede less than others to adversity. Whatever may be true of their moderation in success, in deed they ceded to adversity after Pylos infinitely more than the Athenians did after their disaster on Sicily.[39]

It is safe to conclude that at least in some cases the speakers did not intend to convey the impression of themselves which their

[39] I 84.2, VIII 1.3. Lacking frankness from different motives explains the second speech of the Corinthians in Sparta (I 120–124). By pointing out the dangerous power of Athens in their preceding speech, they had contributed to the Spartans' decision to wage war against Athens. After the decision was made they feared, not without cause (I 125.2), that the Spartans (and the other allies) would not wage the war with sufficient vigor and speed to save besieged Potidaea: "what a man plans in his confident belief in the future is very unlike what he carries out in practice [for when it comes to practice, fear intervenes]." The paraphrase is Gomme's who characteristically omits the thought which we put in brackets. The Corinthians trace the anticipated lack of vigor and speed of their allies to the latter's overconfidence in victory because they do not wish to speak of the lukewarmness of their allies' concern with Potidaea, *i.e.* of the difference of interest between Corinth and her allies (cf. 120.2) and because they do not wish to speak unduly of their allies' fear of Athenian power; their fear of that fear explains why they speak as hopefully of the prospects of the war as they do.

speeches in fact convey. More generally, the speeches written by Thucydides convey thoughts which belong, not to the speakers, but to Thucydides. This is perfectly compatible with the possibility that Thucydides, being a historian, has kept as closely as possible to what the speakers actually said or that no opinion expressed in any speech can be assumed to be Thucydides' opinion. The wording of the speeches surely is Thucydides' own work. No one would go so far as to say that the actual speakers began with identically the same words with which their speeches, edited by Thucydides, begin. For instance, the first speech occurring in the work opens with "Just (Right)" and the second speech, which is a reply to the first, opens with "Necessary (Compulsory)." The thought indicated by these two opening words taken together, the question of the relation of right and necessity,[40] of the difference, tension, perhaps opposition between right and compulsion—a thought which is not the theme of either speech—is Thucydides' thought. This thought so unobtrusively and so subtly indicated illumines everything which preceded the two speeches and everything which follows them. These two opening words indicate the point of view from which Thucydides looks at the Peloponnesian war.

## 5. *Dike*

How does the Peloponnesian war come to sight in the light of the distinction between right and compulsion? In Thucydides' view the Athenians compelled the Spartans to wage war against them; this compulsion is the truest cause of the war, although the least mentioned one, as distinguished from the openly avowed causes. The latter were the dissensions between Athens and Corinth concerning Corcyra and Potidaea (I 23.6). Thucydides speaks first of the facts constituting the avowed causes and then of the fact constituting the unavowed cause, thus inverting the temporal order of the events: the avowed causes are "first with regard to us" whereas the true cause is hidden and kept hidden. But when one studies his account of these avowed causes, one observes that they are as "true" as the truest cause and in fact a part, even the decisive part, of the latter. The truest cause of the war was that the Athenians, by becoming great and thus putting the Spartans to fear, compelled

[40] Cf. Parmenides (*Vorsokratiker*, 7th ed.) fr. 8 lines 14 and 35.

them to wage war. Yet the Athenians' actions, at any rate in regard to Corcyra, made them still greater or at least promised to make them still greater than they were before those actions. The avowed cause of the war which is inferior in truth to the unavowed cause is different from the compulsion exercised by Athens' growing power, regardless of whether that compulsion was exercised before the Corcyrean affair or not. It is the breach of the thirty-year treaty between Sparta and her allies and Athens and her allies, *i.e.* an unjust action, an action against right. "Compulsion" differs from "right."

In the same context in which Thucydides contrasts the truest and least avowed cause with the openly avowed and less true causes he says that the Athenians and the Peloponnesians broke the treaty (I 23.4, 6). Just as he failed to make clear that the alternative to "compulsion" is "right," yet did make clear that the compulsion was exercised by Athens, he fails to make clear who it was who violated right, *i.e.* broke the treaty. No such violation to speak of had occurred prior to the Athenian alliance with Corcyra. Both in concluding and in performing their treaty with Corcyra the Athenians were anxious not to break their treaty with the Peloponnesians (I 44.1, 45.3, 49.4; cf. 35.1–4, 36.1). The Corinthians deny the contention of the Corcyreans and the Athenians that the Corcyrean-Athenian alliance is compatible with the thirty-year treaty (I 40.1–41.4; cf. 53.2, 4; 55.2). Thucydides, the best judge for whom one could wish, does not decide the controversy. He says in effect that the Athenian treaty with Corcyra, which was at war with Corinth (Sparta's ally), "compelled" the Athenians and the Corinthians to come to blows (49.7). If it is impossible to decide whether the later treaty conflicted with the stipulations of the earlier treaty, the earlier treaty might have been broken without either side having been guilty of breach of treaty (cf. 52.3). The action of the Athenians in regard to Potidaea surely did not constitute a breach of the treaty, which fact did not prevent the Corinthians from claiming that it did (66–67; 71.5). The Athenian ambassadors in Sparta as well as the Spartan king deny that Athens had broken the treaty (78.4, 81.5, 85.2) whereas the Spartan ephor denies that the Athenians had in any way refuted the charges against Athens and contends that Athens had done wrong to Sparta's allies. The Spartan assembly agreed with the ephor (86–88). Thucydides makes clear that the Spartans' decision was caused less by the consideration of right than

by compulsion, in other words, that the consideration of right was not simply lacking in truth or irrelevant. The Spartans assert as definitely that the Athenians had broken the treaty or had acted against right (118.3) as Pericles denies it (140.2, 141.1, 144.2, 145). In Thucydides' view there was at this time a "confusion" of the treaty (146), *i.e.* obscurity as to whether the treaty had been violated or not but no breach of the treaty for which one side was clearly responsible. On the other hand what happened in Plataeae in the following spring was clearly a breach of the treaty, but the rights and wrongs of the case are not entirely clear, for whereas the Thebans (Sparta's ally) had invaded Plataeae (Athens' ally) while the treaty was still in force, yet there was already "confusion" of the treaty, they had been called in by a respectable part of the Plataean citizenry (II 5.5, 7, 7.1, III 65–66, V 17.2). With the actions in Plataeae the war had surely started, unless the Spartans were willing to abandon their badly needed Theban ally to Athenian revenge which they could not in reason be expected to do, and the Spartan invasion of Attica which followed almost immediately thus could appear to be in perfect accordance with right.

Six years after the outbreak of the war, after Pylos, the Spartan envoys addressing the Athenian assembly say that it is unclear which side started the war (IV 20.2). One could say that this statement does not necessarily express the Spartans' conviction but was inevitable for them in the circumstances or in agreement with the sly and humble character of their speech as a whole. But it is also possible that after they had so conspicuously failed to bring down the tyrant city, they were more willing than at the beginning of the war to admit that the wrong was not entirely on the side of the Athenians. In his account of the tenth year of the war (his whole account covers twenty-one years), Thucydides states unambiguously in his own name that the war began with the Spartan invasion of Attica (V 20.1), thus implying that it was Sparta which had broken the treaty. At the same time he reproduces or imitates the previous confusion by intimating, through what he says in the same passage on the precise date of the beginning of the war, that it was Thebes which broke the treaty by her attack on Plataeae. He seems to suggest in the same breath that Sparta started the war (broke the treaty) and that Thebes started the war (broke the treaty). The crucial obscurity would seem to be removed by the fact that the Spartans themselves, and apparently no one

else, were handicapped in the first part of the war (431–421) by their awareness of having started the war unlawfully, for the Thebans had attacked Plataeae while the treaty was still in force and they themselves had failed to act according to the treaty in another manner; even if Sparta had not broken the treaty by her own actions, she would have broken it by not disassociating herself from the action of Thebes. The situation was entirely different during the second part of the war, for then there was not the slightest doubt that the treaty had been broken by Athens (VII 18.2–3). In the first part of the war, right was on the side of Athens while in the second part right was on the side of Sparta. By coincidence, in the first part of the war Thucydides was on the side of Athens while in the second part he was to some extent even literally on the side of the Peloponnesians (V 26.5).

If we survey the fate of the issue of right in Thucydides' work, we arrive at the result that he discloses the truth about this issue least ambiguously near the center of his narrative. For the same reason for which his initial remark (I 23.6) failed to make clear that the alternative to "compulsion" is "right," *i.e.* the keeping or breaking of the treaty, and still less who it was who violated right, he conceals as long as possible the fact that it was Sparta which violated right. In saying, in his initial remark, that the Athenians compelled the Spartans to wage war, he may be said to intimate that the Spartans started the war; but he surely conceals entirely the fact that Sparta broke the treaty. The strange character of his treatment of Spartan guilt in the first part of the war becomes still more visible when one contrasts it with his treatment of Athenian guilt in the second part; in the latter case he has no hesitation whatever in stating his own judgment without any ambiguity whatever (VI 105.1–2; cf. V 18.4). The treaties were solemnly sworn; their breach was a violation of divine law. Thus the question of who started the war is linked to the question concerning the divine law.[41] When the Spartans were about to break the treaty and asked the god in Delphi whether they should wage war, he encouraged them, "as is said," to wage it with all their might (I 118.3) without warning them in any way against breaking the treaty. On the con-

[41] Cf. the references to the gods by whom the oaths had been sworn in I 71.5, 78.4, 86.5. The importance of oaths in the relations among cities appears most clearly from II 5.6 and context.

trary by urging them to go to war the god seems to have expressed his belief that in starting the war they would not break the treaty; according to all ordinary criteria the gods seem to help the Spartans in the first five years of the war (I 123.2, II 54.4–5). But when the war lasted longer than the Spartans encouraged by the god may have expected and especially after their misfortune at Pylos, they became doubtful of whether Apollo's oracle gave a sufficient guarantee of the lawfulness of their war or perhaps whether the oracle was not the work of the Delphian priestess rather than of Apollo (cf. V 16.2; I 112.5). They began to believe that their misfortunes had befallen them fittingly because of their violation of right. Still later, contrasting their misfortunes in the first part of the war with their excellent prospects regarding the second half, as well as their injustice in the former with their clear justice in the latter, they reasonably[42] believed that they had failed in the former because of their injustice rather than their ineptitude and that they would be victorious in the latter because of their justice.[43] There is no question that the Spartans remained victorious in the second part of the war and therefore in the war as a whole, and to this extent not only Apollo's initial oracle but perhaps even the gods' concern with oaths may be said to have been vindicated (cf. V 26.4). But for Thucydides it was apparently a question whether the connection between injustice and defeat on the one hand and justice and victory on the other was more than coincidence. As he puts it on a different occasion, it was not the transgression of a superhuman command which brought about a certain misfortune but it was the misfortune which brought about the transgression (II 17.1–2; cf. II 53.3–4).

All this does not mean that the Spartans were wrong in regarding themselves as guilty of the breach of the treaty and still less that Thucydides regarded the question of right as irrelevant. Neither rest and Greekness nor even war is possible without treaties among cities, and the treaties would not be worth keeping in mind if the partners could not be presumed to keep them; this presumption must at least partly be based on past performance, *i.e.* on the justice of the parties. To that extent fidelity to covenants may be said to be

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[42] Cf. the similarly inspired remark of the Spartan Clearchus in Xenophon's *Anabasis* II 2.3.

[43] Cf. VII 18.1–2. Cf. the Spartan parallels in I 128.1 and V 16.2–3, and the Athenian parallel in V 32.1.

by nature right. But since this bond is for obvious reasons not sufficient, men have recourse to divine sanctions. Both oaths and treaties are a kind of speeches which must be judged, as all other speeches must be judged, in the light of the deeds. Treaties form a part of Thucydides' work just as do the speeches of the actors. The treaties differ from the speeches in two ways: they are quoted verbatim whereas the speeches are not, and whereas the speeches are delivered from one side of the conflict, the treaties represent an agreement among the conflicting parties. The treaties may thus be said to reflect on the political plane Thucydides' own impartial speech.

To repeat, Thucydides distinguishes the truest and least avowed cause of the war from the openly avowed and less true causes. The truest cause was the Athenians' compelling the Spartans to wage war against them and the most avowed cause was the Athenians' alleged breach of the treaty. One sees again how much Thucydides' primary point of view is Spartan. The truest cause not being easily avowable by the Spartans[44] and the most avowed cause being rather weak, the Spartans had to think of strengthening the latter in order to have a cause which would be very strong (I 126.1). For this purpose they used two arguments or sets of arguments, the first taken from sacral law and the second being merely political. Justified by the Spartan procedure, Thucydides treats the two in complete separation from one another. He sets forth and explains the Spartan argument taken from sacral law and the Athenian rejoinder which is taken from the same field at much greater length than the Spartan political argument and the Athenian reply.[45] This is all the more remarkable since one of the political arguments—that which dealt with the Athenian decree regarding Megara—appears to have been of much greater importance than any other cause except the truest.[46] Yet in contradistinction to the political argument in question, the arguments dealing with sacral things had a clear basis in law. The Spartans demanded of the Athenians that they cleanse themselves from a pollution which they had contracted while quenching Cylon's attempt, apparently backed by Apollo, to make

[44] Cf. I 86.5.

[45] As appears from I 139 beginning, I 126–138 (about 325 lines) are devoted to the arguments taken from sacral law; if one insists on calling the passage dealing with Themistocles (135.3–138 end) an excursus, one may deduct 97 lines; the political arguments and Pericles' reply to them (139.1–4, 140.3–4, 144.2) take at most 36 lines.

[46] I 139.1, 140.4.

himself tyrant of Athens: the demand had the subsidiary advantage of casting aspersion on the ritual purity of Pericles, Sparta's most determined opponent (126–127; cf. I 13.6). The Athenians, acting probably on Pericles' own advice, replied with the demand that the Spartans cleanse themselves from the two pollutions they had contracted, the first in an action against some Helots and the second while punishing their king Pausanias for his attempt to betray the Greeks to the Persian king. The Spartan demand, especially if it is considered in the light of the excellent Athenian reply (not one but two pollutions and both more recent than the Athenian pollution), is no doubt ridiculous in the eyes of Thucydides; "here the lion laughed," says an old commentator. But apart from the fact that this story will prove to be not the only one bringing to light ridiculous features of Sparta, the ridiculous character of the Spartan demand does not entitle one to find it strange that Thucydides attaches so much greater weight to it than, say, to the Megarian decree, nor that "a special embassy should have been sent with this idle demand, however superstitious the Spartans may have been."[47] To draw a line between superstition and religion in a universally valid manner is not an easy task, especially after natural theology has ceased to be the generally accepted basis of discussion; nor is it easy to draw a line between genuine religious concern and the hypocritical use of religion in Spartans or in others; to say nothing of the fact that taking enlightenment for granted is tantamount to transforming enlightenment into superstition.

One must consider the Cylon story also as part of its broad context, *i.e.* of Thucydides' whole account, given in the first book, of the causes of the Peloponnesian war. The first book consists of the following parts:

I. Introduction (ch. 1–23): from the most ancient times till 431.
II. The openly avowed causes (ch. 24–88): from 439 till the first half of 432.
III. The truest cause (ch. 89–118): from 479 till 439.
IV. Continuation of II (ch. 119–125): second half of 432.
V. The causes meant to strengthen the openly avowed causes and continuation of IV (ch. 126–146): from ca. 630 till the end of 432.

[47] Gomme, *loc. cit.* 447.

The transitions from I to II, from II to III, and from IV to V are returns from later events to earlier ones. In particular Thucydides turns from the openly avowed causes which are later in time and less true to the truest and least avowed cause which is first in time. From this fact taken by itself we are led to expect that the archeology which begins at the beginning is meant to bring to light the simply first cause or causes (as distinguished from the first cause of the Peloponnesian war) which as such are the simply true and simply "unspoken" or immanifest causes. This expectation is confirmed by the study of the archeology. Thucydides could not have written the archeology if he had not "returned" from the present to the beginnings in a number of stages; his order of presentation imitates in a manner his order of finding. The central part of the first book consists of two sections: (1) the Athenian hegemony (ch. 89–96) and (2) the Athenian empire (ch. 97–118); the Athenian empire rather than the Athenian hegemony is the truest cause of the Peloponnesian war. Thucydides indicates the importance of the second section by introducing it with a preface (97.2). In that preface he is completely silent about the fact (which would have borne being restated) that he is about to lay bare the truest cause of the Peloponnesian war. Instead he presents that second section (which deals with events that occurred between ca. 476 and 440) in the first place as a kind of supplement to available accounts of the preceding epochs, if not as an improved version of Hellanicus' chronicle, and only secondarily as an exhibition of how the Athenian empire was established. If we turn from what one may call Thucydides' second preface to his first preface—his statement on the character of his whole work (I 20–22)—we observe to our surprise that there too he is completely silent about the subject of "cause." He presents there his "quest for the truth" as quest for what was truly done and truly said, *i.e.* for the true facts, and not for the true causes.[48] It also deserves mention that while Herodotus mentions "cause" in the opening of his work, the "scientific historian"

[48] As for the distinction between "fact" and "cause" cf. I 23.4–5. Perhaps the most important difference between the remark on the Athenian tyrannicide in I 20.2 and the repetition of that subject in VI 54–59 is precisely the fact that only in the latter is the cause of the tyrannicide made clear (cf. 54.1, 57.3, 59.1). Contrast V 53 (the central event of the thirteenth year) about a "cause" which was merely a "pretense" with I 23.6.

Thucydides does not.[49] In these manners he indicates the gravity of the question regarding the true causes—of a question which otherwise could seem to be (as it is for the scientific historian) a matter of course.

## 6. *Ananke*

From what has been said, it follows that the question of the true cause must be understood in the light of the distinction between Right and Compulsion. The Spartans believed that their injustice had caused their adversity in the first part of the war. Thucydides will only believe that that Spartan belief might have had an adverse effect on their conduct of the war. This does not mean that right belongs as it were to the sphere of mere seeming and only compulsion to the sphere of being, or that right and compulsion are simply opposites. Sparta indeed broke the treaty, but she was compelled to do so because she saw that a large part of Greece was already subject to the Athenians, hence feared that they would become still stronger and hence was forced to stop them before it was too late.[50] Compulsion excuses; it justifies an act which in itself would be unjust (cf. IV 92.5). The Athenians on the other hand, it seems, acted unjustly; they were not compelled to increase their power

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[49] In I 1.3 Thucydides seems to say that no clear and certain knowledge of what happened prior to the Peloponnesian war is available (cf. also I 20 beginning) yet he cannot possibly mean this, for he gives a clear account at least of what happened in the decades immediately preceding that war; above all, his very attempt to prove the superiority of the Peloponnesian war to the earlier wars requires clear and certain knowledge of the earlier wars; likewise his quest for the causes of the Peloponnesian war, *i.e.* for things preceding that war, would not make sense if his remark in I 1.3 were taken literally. But Thucydides was not illiterate. One must then consider the import of the literally understood passage. If there is no clear and certain knowledge of what happened prior to the Peloponnesian war, there cannot be clear and certain knowledge of the supremacy of the Peloponnesian war; the belief in that supremacy is only a prejudice just like the belief in the supremacy of any other war on the part of the contemporaries of that war (I 21.2). If there is no clear and certain knowledge of what happened prior to the Peloponnesian war, there cannot be clear and certain knowledge of its causes, let alone of its truest cause; those causes are veiled in mystery; it is at least as reasonable to give an account of them in Homeric terms as in Thucydidean terms.

[50] I 23.6, 86.5, 88, II 8.5.

ever more (for instance, by allying themselves with the Corcyreans or by embarking on the Sicilian expedition); they were prompted not by compulsion but by *hybris* (cf. IV 98.5–6). This would not necessarily mean that they lost the war on that account. Yet partly the Athenians themselves and partly Thucydides through his narrative show that Athens was herself compelled to increase her power or was prompted by fear of the Persians and of the Spartans to found her empire and to enlarge it; she was compelled to become the tyrant city; she was compelled to compel Sparta to wage war against her. In their speech in Sparta the Athenians go considerably further. They claim that they were compelled to found their empire and to bring it to its present form above all by fear, then also by honor, and later also by interest (I 75.3). If being induced by honor or glory and especially by interest is regarded as compulsory and participating in the exculpation conferred by the compulsory, it is hard to see how any war or how any acquisition and exercise of tyrannical rule by one city over others can ever be unjust.[51] Accordingly when they repeat the three motives which compel cities to become imperial, the Athenians change the order by speaking of "honor, fear and interest." They go so far as to say that Athens has merely followed what was always established, namely, that the stronger keep down the weaker, *i.e.* that recourse to fear is not needed at all in order to justify empire; the innovation lies not with the Athenians but with the Spartans who now suddenly have recourse to "the just speech" which has not hitherto deterred anyone strong enough from aggrandizing himself (I 76.2). The Spartans do not contest the Athenian thesis. To discuss generalities of this kind would be in their eyes to exhibit excessive cleverness in useless matters (cf. I 84.3). On the proper occasion Pericles himself will state the Athenian thesis in Athens herself (II 63.2). But the Athenians are not the only ones who state it (cf. IV 61.5). On the other hand, the Athenian Euphemus, speaking in Camarina—perhaps reduced to euphemism because the situation of the Athenians in Sicily was not as simple as their situation before the outbreak of the war or on Melos—while not avoiding the comparison of the imperial city to a tyrant, justifies both the Athenians' empire and their

[51] With a view to IV 98.5 one would have to say that on the basis of what the Athenian ambassadors in Sparta assert, the very possibility of *hybris* and hence of divine law does not exist.

Sicilian expedition by their concern with their salvation or security alone, by their fear alone.[52]

Even if according to the instruction silently conveyed by Thucydides' narrative all cities which have the required power act in accordance with the Athenians' thesis regarding the compulsory power of interest, it would perhaps not necessarily follow that they are in fact compelled to act in this manner. The issue is decided in the dialogue between the Athenians and the Melians. During the peace between the two parts of the Peloponnesian war, the Athenians resolved to make themselves masters of the island of Melos, a Spartan colony but neutral in the war because of Athens' naval power. Before beginning the assault, the Athenians make an attempt to persuade the Melians to come over to their side. Just as, immediately before the outbreak of the war, Pericles did not permit the Spartan ambassadors to address the Athenian people (II 12.2; cf. IV 22) because he feared that they might deceive it, the Melian government takes the same precaution against the same danger. In order not to deceive even the Melian government, the Athenian ambassadors propose that they not make a long speech to which the Melians would reply with a long speech, but that their exchange should have the character of a dialogue.[53] The Athenian ambassadors talk as if they had been listening to Socrates' censure of Protagoras or Gorgias. Through their proposal Thucydides surely throws new light on the speeches with which his work abounds and at the same time stresses the unique importance of the dialogue which occurred on Melos. The dialogue takes place behind closed doors. Yet in the Melians' view it is a dialogue which, owing to the presence of the Athenian army, cannot lead to agreement but only to either war or their surrender into slavery; they have no hope that they might persuade the Athenians to go back to where they belong. According to the Athenians it is indeed the present facts which the Melians can see with their eyes, namely, the Athenian forces, which must be the starting point of the dialogue about how the Melians can be saved from present danger. The Melians cannot

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[52] VI 83.2, 4; 85.1; 87.2. Cf. the limited meaning of compulsion according to which it excludes interest and the like in VII 57.

[53] We consider here only the speeches not the butchery; what Thucydides thought about that deed may be inferred from his judgment on the intention to butcher the Mytileneans (III 36.4, 6 and 49.4).

but admit this. The Athenians next determine the principle of the deliberation. The issue is not what is just but what is feasible—what the Athenians can do to the Melians and the Melians can do to the Athenians; questions of right arise only when the power to compel is more or less equal on both sides; if there is so great inequality as between Athens and Melos, the stronger does what he can and the weaker yields. The Athenians have no doubt that the Melians with whom they converse, *i.e.* the leading men as distinguished from the people, know the truth of the principle which they stated, yet they prove to be mistaken. The Melians are however compelled to argue on the basis of interest as distinguished from right. Arguing on this basis they remind the Athenians of the fact that there is an interest common to Melos and Athens: he who is today the stronger may be the weaker at some future time and then his former victims or their friends will take a terrible revenge on him for what he has done to the weaker in the heyday of his strength. The Athenians are not frightened by that prospect, for the power which will defeat them in the future will think of its interest rather than of vindictive justice and the Athenians will be as prudent to cede to their victor's interest as, they hope, the Melians will be at the present time; an imperial power must think not of its situation under its future victor but of its present subjects who indeed, in case of successful rebellion, will think of nothing but revenge; it is precisely in order to deprive their island subjects of all hope of resistance to Athens' naval power that the Athenians must become masters of Melos; precisely Melos' peacefully becoming an ally of Athens is that common interest to which the Melians appeal: the preservation of Melos as an ally of Athens is profitable to both Melos and Athens. The Melians are reduced to speechlessness, for their question whether the Athenians will not be satisfied with the Melians being their friends instead of their enemies and at the same time unallied with either Athens or Sparta is absurd; even assuming that friendship and neutrality in the same respect are not mutually exclusive, the Melians surely also wish to be friends of Sparta, Athens' enemy. The Athenians cannot make this point at this time in the debate because they are not at war with Sparta. But the Melians understand the situation sufficiently so as to limit themselves to offer continued neutrality rather than friendship: can the Athenians not tolerate neutrals? After all, there is a difference between the Athenians subjugating cities which are their colonies or otherwise have

become their dependencies and then rebelled, and their subjugating a city which never belonged to them. They thus surreptitiously bring in the consideration of right as distinguished from interest. The Athenians counter this argument by denying that there is a difference between these two kinds of cities as far as right is concerned; surely the cities subject to Athens believe that their subjection is due to Athens' superior power; the important distinction is to be made from the point of view of Athenian interest as distinguished from right; accordingly one must distinguish not between legitimate subjects of Athens and neutrals, but between mainland cities and island cities; the mere fact that there are island cities not subject to Athens is taken as a sign of Athens' deficient naval power and is hence detrimental to Athens; the Athenians do not fear, as the Melians advise them to do, that as a consequence of their action against Melos all hitherto neutral cities will ally themselves with Athens' enemies, for the mainland cities know that they are not threatened by Athens whereas all island cities are a threat to Athens. When speaking of the mainland cities the Athenians had mentioned, somewhat inadvertently, the "freedom" of these cities as distinguished from the actual or potential condition of the islanders. The Melians take this as an admission that if they yield they will be enslaved. They are set to defend their freedom at all costs. By taking up the issue "freedom-slavery," they do not in violation of the rule of the dialogue introduce the issue of right; they remain within the sphere of interest in so far as it is obviously to a man's or a city's interest to be free, yet they enlarge that sphere in so far as freedom is also something noble; they feel that they would be base cowards by not risking everything for their freedom. The Athenians deny that yielding to much greater power is disgraceful; not to yield would show a lack of good sense or of moderation—of that virtue of which men of Spartan blood must be proud. The Melians tacitly admit that yielding to much greater power is not disgraceful but they question that the Athenians' power is much greater than theirs. Surely, the Athenians are more numerous than they but the outcome of a war does not depend merely on number; so they have hope. The Athenians and Melians thus agree that the issue is not whether one should act nobly or basely but whether there is ground of hope for the Melians. The Melians are hopeful. The Athenians warn them against hoping; not their small number but their total weakness, which is quite manifest, makes it hopeless

for them to risk everything for the sake of their independence; they can still be saved by human means; the sensible rulers of Melos will not commit the mistake of the many who, when the manifest hopes fail, have recourse to the immanifest ones supplied by soothsayers and oracles which are surely ruinous. Thereupon the Melians reveal the grounds of their hope and thus the whole extent of their disagreement with the Athenians. Two things, they say, decide the issue of wars, power and chance; as for chance it depends (to some extent or altogether) on the divine, and the divine favors the just; as for the deficient power of the Melians, it will be strengthened by the alliance with the Spartans, who will come to the rescue of Melos if only for sheer shame. The question of whether the Melians act nobly by resisting the Athenians has been reduced to the question of whether they act wisely in doing so; one cannot act nobly by acting foolishly. Whether they act foolishly or not is now seen to depend entirely on how well grounded is their hope in the divine on the one hand and in the Spartans on the other. The Melians had not mentioned the divine when speaking of power. To the Melians' hope for divine help to the just, the Athenians oppose the following view of the divine and of justice. Both the divine and the human are compelled by their natures without any qualification each to rule over whatever is weaker than it; this law has not been laid down by the Athenians nor were they the first to act in accordance with it, but they found it in being and they will leave it in being for the future, forever, in the certainty that the Melians and all others would act on it if they had the same power as the Athenians. (One could say that according to the Athenians this law is the true divine law, the law of the interplay of motion and rest, of compulsion and right, compulsion obtaining among unequals and right obtaining among cities of more or less equal power.) That this law obtains among men, the Athenians claim to know evidently, whereas its being in force in regard to the divine is for them only a matter of opinion. This does not mean that they are not quite certain whether the Melians' belief in just gods may not have some foundation, but rather that they are not quite certain whether the divine exists or that they do not wish to deny its existence. Differently stated, the Athenians deny that they act impiously for in acting as they do they imitate the divine; in addition, the divine could not have forbidden the stronger to rule over the weaker because the stronger is compelled by natural necessity to rule over

the weaker. What is true of divine help is true also of Spartan help. The Melians must be inexperienced and foolish indeed if they believe that the Spartans will help them for sheer shame. The Spartans are decent enough among themselves in that, in their relations with one another, they comply with the customs of their country; but in their relations with other men they, more obviously than other men, regard as noble what is pleasant, and as just what is expedient. (The Spartans behave habitually toward non-Spartans as the Athenians behaved among themselves during the worst times of the plague—II 53.3.) The Melians question the Athenians' view of Sparta (as distinguished from the Athenians' view of the gods) at least to the extent that they assert that precisely self-interest, as distinguished from the noble and the just, will induce the Spartans to come to their help. The Melians and Athenians have now reached agreement as to the necessity of disregarding completely what we would call all religious and moral considerations. The Athenians rejoin that self-interest induces men to act in the manner in which the Melians hope that the Spartans will act only when it is safe to do so; the Spartans are therefore the least likely to gamble; and to come to the rescue of Melos is obviously a very great gamble. The Melians cannot deny the notorious fact that the Spartans are very cautious men. From here on they can speak only in the optative mood. The Athenians are justified in saying that the Melians have not said a single word which would give support to their confidence; their strongest arguments are mere hopes. The Athenians conclude with a sober warning: it is sheer folly to call the Melians' becoming a tribute-paying ally of Athens a disgraceful act; the Melians will be truly disgraced if, by foolishly compelling the Athenians to fight and defeat them, they will bring it about that they all will be killed and their women and children be sold into slavery. After having deliberated among themselves, the Melian rulers repeat their rejection of the Athenian proposal; they repeat that they trust in chance, which depends on the divine, and in the Spartans. The Athenians leave them with the remark that they are the only ones who regard the future things as more evident than things seen, and who behold the unevident by virtue of wishing it as already occurring; their ruin will be proportionate to their trust in Sparta and in chance and in hopes. As appears from the sequel, the Athenian prediction comes true.

The Melians are defeated in speech before they are defeated in

deed. One must blush to say so, but one is compelled to admit to oneself that in Thucydides' view the Melians' resistance to the Athenians' demand was a foolish act and the fate of the Melians is therefore not tragic. The last doubt which may remain is removed by what he says about the Chians' failure in their revolt against Athens. The Chians were much more powerful and wealthy than the Melians, but, being sober or moderate, they were as concerned with safety as the Spartans. By revolting against the Athenians they may seem to have disregarded their safety or to have acted irrationally, but this is not the case. They took that risk when according to all ordinary considerations it was wise to take it: at the time of the revolt they had many good allies on whose help they could count and, as the Athenians themselves had to admit, Athens' cause was almost hopeless as a consequence of the Sicilian disaster; no one could be blamed for not having foreseen Athens' extraordinary resilience.[54] One can explain Thucydides' implicit judgment on the action of the Melians in two ways which are not mutually exclusive. The city may and must demand self-sacrifice from its citizens; the city itself however cannot sacrifice itself; a city may without disgrace accept even under compulsion the overlordship of another city which is much more powerful; this is not to deny of course that death or extinction is to be preferred to enslavement proper. There is a certain similarity between the city and the individual; just as the individual, the city cannot act nobly or virtuously if it lacks the necessary equipment, *i.e.* power, or, in other words, virtue is useless without sufficient armament.[55] If the action of the Melians was foolish, one must wonder whether this fact throws any light on the most striking reason of their action, *i.e.* their view that the gods help the just or harm the unjust. This view is the Spartan view (cf. VII 18.2). It is opposed to the Athenian view as stated most clearly in the dialogue with the Melians. The Melian dialogue leaves one wondering whether on the basis of the common belief one would not have to state Thucydides' view by saying that trust in help from the gods is like trust in help from

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[54] VIII 24.4–5. Cf. with this passage III 40.1: Cleon judges the "mistake" of the Mytileneans from the point of view of justice; Thucydides judges the "mistake" of the Chians from the point of view of safety or prudence. Cf. IV 108.3–4. Cf. also the case of the Orchomenians (V 61.5).

[55] Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 1178a23–33; Xenophon, *Anabasis* II 1.12.

the Spartans or that the gods are as little concerned with justice in their dealings with human beings as the Spartans are in their dealings with foreigners; the fact that the gods' existence is not explicitly discussed between the Athenians and the Melians does not prove that it was of no concern to Thucydides. Taking the question of right entirely by itself, *i.e.* disregarding the gods altogether, one may say that there is a kinship between injustice and motion and between justice and rest,[56] but that just as rest presupposes motion and issues in motion, justice presupposes injustice and issues in injustice. It is precisely for this reason that human beings seek support for right in the gods or that the question of right cannot be considered entirely apart from the question concerning the gods. In the Melian dialogue the Athenians remain victorious. There is no debate in Thucydides' work in which the Spartan or Melian view defeats the Athenian view. After their surrender to the Spartans, the Plataeans are permitted to defend themselves against the capital charge of not having helped the Spartans in the war; they appeal to right and to the gods. Their worst enemies, the Thebans, acting as their accusers, answer them on the ground of right without referring to the gods. The issue of necessity or expediency, as distinguished from that of right, and in particular the issue whether it is expedient for the Spartans and their allies to kill the Plataeans, is not raised. The Plataeans are killed, the Spartans having identified, according to the Plataeans' contention, the just with what is immediately profitable to them (III 56.3), for it was profitable to them to give in to the Thebans' savage hatred for the Plataeans; the Spartans act in accordance with what the Athenians told the Melians to be the Spartan way of acting (cf. III 68.4). Quite different were the proceedings in Athens regarding the fate of the Mytileneans who had failed in their revolt against their Athenian ally. Whereas in the Peloponnesian camp there was no one to oppose the killing of the helpless Plataeans, in Athens there was a debate as to what should be done to the helpless Mytileneans. Cleon, who favors the butchery, is the one who appeals to right: the Mytileneans acted most unjustly, they preferred force to justice, they were prompted by *hybris*, and the execution of all of them is nothing but their just punishment (III 39.3–6); in addition, in this case at any rate the just perfectly agrees with what is profitable

[56] Cf. Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 1104b24–25 and Isaiah 30.15–16. Cf. Pindar, *Pyth.* VIII beg.

in the long run for Athens. Diodotus, who opposes the killing of the Mytileneans, argues entirely on the ground of what is profitable for Athens to do to the Mytileneans; he does not question her right to kill them all (III 44, 47.5–6). Similarly it is the harsh Spartan ephor who was responsible for Sparta's breaking the treaty and not the nice king Archidamus who appeals above all to right (I 86); and the Athenians, who entered the first part of the war with justice on their side, never mention their justice and still less boast of it. It seems that the case for right or the appeal to right is made only by those Thucydidean speakers who are either completely helpless or else unjust.[57] This does not mean, to repeat, that the principle stated most forcefully by the Athenians on Melos is incompatible with justice in the sense of fidelity to covenants; it is perfectly compatible with such fidelity; it is only incompatible with covenants which would limit a city's aspirations for all future times; but such were not the covenants with which Thucydides had to be seriously concerned.

The Athenians' assertion of what one may call the natural right of the stronger as a right which the stronger exercises by natural necessity is not a doctrine of Athenian imperialism; it is a universal doctrine; it applies to Sparta for instance as well as to Athens. It is not refuted by the facts of the Spartans' moderation, of their satisfaction with what they possess, or of their unwillingness to go to war. In other words, the natural right of the stronger does not lead in all cases to expansionism. There are limits beyond which expansion is no longer safe. There are powers which are "saturated." The Spartans were as "imperialist" as the Athenians; only their empire was so to speak invisible because their empire had been established much earlier than the Athenian empire and had reached its natural limit; it was therefore no longer an object of surprise and offense. By overlooking this fact, one moves in the direction of the supreme folly committed during World War II when men in high places acted on the assumption that there was a British Empire and British imperialism but no Russian Empire and Russian imperialism because they held that an empire consists of a number of countries separated by salt water. Chios which was second only to Sparta in moderation, was second only to Sparta regarding the number of her slaves. Sparta was moderate because she had grave troubles with

[57] For the second case cf. *Republic* 366c3–d1.

her Helots; the Helots made her moderate.[58] Thucydides just as his Athenians on Melos did not know of a strong city which failed to rule a weak city when it was to the former's interest to do so, merely for reasons of moderation, *i.e.* independently of calculation.

## 7. *The Dialogue on Melos and the Disaster in Sicily*

Yet is not precisely according to Thucydides' presentation the Athenian dialogue with the Melians followed by the Athenian disaster in Sicily? Is that disaster, which included the killing by the sword or by hunger of thousands and thousands of Athenian prisoners, not the punishment for the Athenians' speech and deed on Melos? Is it not its consequence whether mediated by the gods or not? This thought is perhaps the best example of what Thucydides meant by stories delightful for the ear, for he makes it quite clear that however unjust, daring, or immoderate the attempt to conquer Sicily may have been, its failure was not due to its injustice or daring; despite their deed and speech on Melos, the Athenians' Sicilian expedition could well have succeeded. Nor can one say that the Melian dialogue, revealing the abandonment of Pericles' political principle by the Athenians, prepared the abandonment by them of Pericles' cautious war policy. While Pericles might never have said what the Athenians said on Melos and while he might not have regarded the Athenians' action against Melos as expedient, his political principle did not differ from that of those Athenians (II 62.2, 63.2). The Sicilian expedition ran counter to Pericles' view of how the war should be conducted but Thucydides never says that Pericles' views were always sound. On the contrary, to repeat, he regarded the Sicilian expedition as perfectly feasible (I 144.1; II 65.7, 11; cf. also VI 11.1). According to him, the Sicilian expedition failed because of the fundamental defect of post-Periclean, as distinguished from Periclean, domestic politics; after Pericles there was no longer among the leading men that perfect harmony between private interest and public interest that was characteristic of Pericles; the concern with private honor and private gain prevailed. Thanks to his manifest superiority Pericles became as it were naturally the first man, whereas none of his successors possessed that superiority, but each had to fight for his place in the sun and therefore was compelled to make concessions to the *demos* which were

[58] VIII 40.2 and 24.4. Cf. I 101.2, 118.2, IV 41.3, 80.3–4, V 14.3.

detrimental to the city. It was the overriding concern with private interest which ruined the Sicilian expedition and ultimately caused the loss of the war (II 65.7–12). Post-Periclean Athens lacked that singular public-spiritedness which was the honor of Athens from the time of the Persian war until the age of Pericles (I 70.6, 8; 74.1–2). As Pericles makes clear in the beautiful sentences of his Funeral Speech, Athens more than any other city gave free rein to the individual's development toward graceful manysidedness or self-sufficiency or permitted him to be a genuine individual: so that he could be infinitely superior as a citizen to the citizens of any other city. In what is in Thucydides' work his farewell speech, Pericles reminds his fellow citizens of the necessity to be devoted wholeheartedly to their city. In this respect there appears to be complete agreement between the statesman and the historian. Thucydides is concerned above everything else with the cities (the Athenians, the Spartans and so on) as distinguished from the individuals, therefore with the warlike or peaceful relations of the city with other cities rather than with their inner structure; therefore he deals with the lives and deaths of the individuals only from the point of view of the cities to which they belong.

Those who contend that there is a connection between the Melian dialogue and the Sicilian disaster must have in mind a connection between the two events which Thucydides intimates rather than sets forth explicitly by speaking of the emancipation of private interest in post-Periclean Athens. The Melian dialogue shows nothing of such an emancipation. But it contains the most unabashed denial occurring in Thucydides' work of a divine law which must be respected by the city or which moderates the city's desire for "having more." The Athenians on Melos, in contradistinction to Callicles or Thrasymachus, limit themselves indeed to asserting the natural right of the stronger with regard to the cities; but are Callicles and Thrasymachus not more consistent than they? Can one encourage, as even Pericles and precisely Pericles does, the city's desire for "having more" than other cities without in the long run encouraging the individual's desire for "having more" than his fellow citizens?[59] Pericles was indeed dedicated wholeheartedly to the

[59] The intermediate stage between the city and the individuals is the politically most relevant groups within the city, the powerful or rich and the multitude. Their antagonism culminating in civil war is between the antagonism culminating in war among the cities and the antagonism culminating in treason and the like among individuals.

common good of the city but to its common good unjustly understood. He did not realize that the unjust understanding of the common good is bound to undermine dedication to the common good however understood. He had not given sufficient thought to the precarious character of the harmony between private interest and public interest; he had taken that harmony too much for granted.

Thucydides looks at the deaths of men from the point of view of the cities to which they belong. He notes carefully what was done to the dead after the battles; their seemly burial is the final act of their city's care for its sons; by their death they do not cease, and yet they cease, to belong to their city: Hades is not divided into cities. The customary practice becomes the theme in Pericles' Funeral Speech, since it was an ancient law in Athens to bring the bodies of the fallen soldiers home for public and common burial and to have the fallen soldiers praised immediately after the burial by an outstanding citizen (II 34.1, 35.3). Pericles does not approve of the law which instituted these funeral speeches because of the difficulty in satisfying the listeners: for some of them no praise is sufficient and others regard the praise as exaggerated. One cannot praise highly enough those who brought the supreme sacrifice and yet the praise must remain credible. In addition, not all fallen soldiers led equally praiseworthy lives—some were even good-for-nothings (II 42.3), and died an equally praiseworthy death. Pericles overcomes the difficulty by praising above all the city, or the cause for which all of them died equally. It is the praise of the city of Athens and of what it stands for on which the fame of Pericles' Funeral Speech is founded. Not so much the city as city as a city of the stature of Athens can demand the supreme sacrifice. Yet all cities demand it equally and in many cases are obeyed with no less dedication than the city of Athens: the noble death for the fatherland is not the Athenians' nor even the Greeks' preserve. And even the Athenian's death for his fatherland which is of unique glory is not exhausted by its being a death for Athens. Thucydides draws our attention to this difficulty by making his Pericles avoid the words "death," "dying," or "dead bodies": only once does his Pericles speak in the Funeral Speech of death, and then only in the expression "unfelt death" (II 43.6).[60] Accordingly, in the allusion to the

[60] This was imitated by Plato in his *Menexenus;* Plato goes even further than Thucydides' Pericles. Contrast with this not only the Gettysburg Address but even the *Epitaphioi* of Demosthenes, Hyperides, and Lysias.

climactic event of dying that Pericles makes, he causes it to last only a very brief moment.[61] The glory of the city of Athens is to make the individuals, the survivors, both the soldiers and the mourners, oblivious of the agonies of their comrades and their beloved. But Pericles is not a Spartan addressing Spartans, as he had made abundantly clear through the bulk of his speech. He cannot altogether avoid at least mentioning the grief of the individuals who lost their sons, brothers or husbands. The callousness with which he speaks of, or rather alludes to, the grief especially of the aged parents who lost their only son, cannot easily be surpassed. He is punished appropriately. To the widows he can say no more than to address to them this statesmanlike admonition: they should be as good as women can be, and that wife is best who is least mentioned for good or for ill in male society. His wife was the famous Aspasia. The statesman who looked at life and death only from the point of view of the city forgets his private life. It is most fitting that in Thucydides' narrative the praise of Pericles should precede Pericles' death by thirty months (II 65.6). It is no less fitting that the Funeral Speech is followed immediately by Thucydides' account of the plague—an account which abounds with mentions of death, dead, dying, and corpses and which deals with an event that brought home to everyone the limitations of the city. Thucydides does not mention the fact that Pericles lost two of his sons and the largest part of his kin and friends through the plague and died as a consequence of the plague. His last speech, delivered under the impact of the plague, takes up the subject of "private calamities" with greater force than the two earlier speeches. That speech is immediately followed by Thucydides' praise of Pericles the guiding theme of which is the conflict between the private and the public. Thucydides praises especially Pericles' foresight in regard to the war: his foresight was limited to the war; he could not have foreseen the plague but he did not foresee or consider sufficiently the things which were brought home to his fellow citizens and even to him by the plague (II 65.6; cf. 64.1–2).

To return to the question concerning the connection between the Melian dialogue and the Sicilian disaster, that connection is established by the fact that it is in the long run impossible to en-

[61] II 42.4. Cf. also 43.2 beginning where he seems to deny that death is each one's own while asserting that "the ageless [not "immortal"] praise" is each one's own.

courage the city's desire for "having more" at the expense of other cities without encouraging the desire of the individual for "having more" at the expense of his fellow citizens. This reasoning seems to support the "Spartan" praise of moderation and of the divine law. Yet we have seen that this praise is not accepted by Thucydides in the last analysis. If Thucydides was consistent, he must have accepted the view set forth by Callicles and Thrasymachus while avoiding, as a matter of course, its crudities and superficialities. The test will be his teaching on tyranny. In different ways both the Spartans and the Athenians were opposed to tyranny. Sparta was never ruled by a tyrant; Athens threw off the yoke of her tyrants with the help of the Spartans; the admiration for the Athenian tyrannicides Harmodius and Aristogeiton was an important part of the manner in which the Athenian democracy understood itself. After having indicated in his Introduction that the view held by the Athenian multitude about the Athenian tyrannicides includes a grave factual error, he gives on the proper occasion, in the sixth book, a detailed account of Athenian tyranny and its end. Thucydides was compelled to explain the fear of tyrants which gripped the Athenian *demos* so eager to be itself a tyrant. The celebrated deed of the Athenian tyrannicides was caused, we learn, not by public-spirited love of liberty but by erotic jealousy. Aristogeiton, a mature man, was in love with the youth Harmodius to whom Hipparchus, the brother of the tyrant Hippias, made unsuccessful advances; hurt in his erotic feelings and fearing that the powerful Hipparchus might succeed in his attempts by the use of force, Aristogeiton resolved on putting down the tyranny. Yet Hipparchus did not dream of using force; he committed however the folly of hurting Harmodius out of spite by insulting the latter's sister. By some accident the two lovers failed to kill the tyrant yet did kill his brother whom later legend promoted to the rank of tyrant for the greater glory of the killers. The celebrated deed was an irrational act as regards its first as well as its immediate cause and, above all, as regards its effect. For only after the slaying of Hippias' brother did the tyranny become harsh and bloody since the tyrant became frightened. Prior to that act, the tyranny was popular; the Athenian tyrants were men of "virtue and intelligence";[62] while not imposing heavy taxes

[62] *I.e.* they had the same qualities as Brasidas (IV 81.2). VI 54.6–7 shows that there is no conflict between tyranny and piety; cf. also I 126.3–4 and Aristotle, *Politics* 1314b38ff.

they adorned the city, managed the wars and brought the sacrifices in the temples; they left the laws of the city as they found them; they only arranged that there was always one of themselves in the ruling offices. This state of things which, it would seem, was in no way shocking and degrading, came to an end by the irrational act of the tyrannicides which started a chain of actions as the result of which Hippias was expelled from Athens. He went to the king of Persia, whence he came many years later, as an old man, with the Persian army to Marathon. Thucydides was enabled to destroy the popular and populist legend partly because he had access to an oral tradition which was not accessible to every Athenian. Perhaps one will find that Thucydides' truthful account of Athenian tyranny is not a vindication of tyranny as such, for he says that owing to the fact that the tyrants were concerned only with their own safety and the advancement of their own houses, they hardly did any deed worth mentioning and surely did not embark on large-scale expansion of their cities' power.[63] But we do not yet know whether Thucydides regarded empire as the highest good, for to say that under certain conditions empire is possible and necessary is not the same as to be an "imperialist." After all, under certain conditions civil wars too and tyrannies become possible or necessary.

The conflict between public and private interest to which Thucydides traces the Sicilian disaster has another side to it of which he does not speak, for good reasons, in his eulogy of Pericles, but which becomes apparent from his narrative. We shall not forget the case of Alcibiades to which above all he points when contrasting post-Periclean Athenian politics with the situation under Pericles. We shall first consider two other cases. Demosthenes, the most lovable of Thucydides' characters, having committed a grave blunder in Aetolia owing to which a considerable number of better Athenians than those praised by Pericles in his Funeral Speech had perished, did not return to Athens because he was afraid of what the Athenians would do to him on account of his failure. He was suffi-

[63] I 17, 18.1–2, 20.2, VI 53.3–59.4. Just as Thucydides knew "privately" of what truly happened at the time of the so-called tyrannicide, he must also have known privately the correspondence between the Greek traitors Themistocles and Pausanias and the Persian king which he quotes verbatim (I 128.7, 129.3, 137.4). The tyrant Hippias also ended as a traitor of the Greeks to the Persian king. The phenomena "tyranny" and "treason," rooted in the opposition of self-interest and public interest, belong together. As for the possibility of an Athenian tyrant at the time of the Peloponnesian war, cf. especially VIII 66.

ciently versatile to compensate the city for his defeat by a splendid victory in the next campaign in the same region, after which victory it was safe for him to return (III 98.4–5, 114.1). We catch here a glimpse of the most serious conflict between private and public interest in Athens: public-spirited men must fear for their safety if they commit serious mistakes or what the *demos* regards as serious mistakes. In cases like this it is not love of private gain or prestige but a man's more legitimate concern for his safety and honor which comes into conflict with public service.[64] During the Sicilian expedition Demosthenes was sent to Sicily with a strong army in order to assist Nicias who was not sufficiently strong to reduce Syracuse. He wished to avoid Nicias' great mistake which consisted in postponing his assault on Syracuse too long; he therefore launched an attack as soon as possible; he suffered a severe defeat. The situation was in every aspect much graver than after his defeat in Aetolia. Hence he did not think for one moment of his own safety and proposed immediate return of the whole armament to Athens. Nicias still had hope of success at Syracuse. But the reason which he gave openly in a council of war for rejecting Demosthenes' proposal was that the Athenians would take a dim view of the withdrawal of the armament from Syracuse unless they had voted for it in advance; if the men in command in Sicily take it upon themselves to return to Athens, the Athenian vote on the commanders in Sicily will be swayed by clever calumniators; the very servicemen who are now most in favor of an immediate return to Athens will assert after their return that the Athenian commanders had committed treason, having been bribed by the enemy; knowing the natures of the Athenians, he prefers to stay in Sicily and to die at the hands of the enemies as an individual ("privately") rather than to perish through the Athenians ["publicly"] on a degrading charge and unjustly (VII 47–48). Nicias regarded this reasoning as publicly defensible: no one could deny that his and Demosthenes' safety and honor were at the mercy of unscrupulous demagogues and of the easily excitable and ignorant *demos;* he preferred for himself an honorable death in battle. But by choosing "privately" his death in Sicily, he chose "publicly" the destruction of the Athenian armament in Sicily and therewith, as far as in him lay, the ruin of Athens; out of justi-

[64] Cf. Machiavelli, *Discorsi* I 28–31.

fied fear of the Athenian *demos* he acted like a traitor. If men of the integrity of Demosthenes and Nicias could, if to different degrees, be swayed by fear for their safety to take such questionable courses, the conduct of Alcibiades appears in a different light than it otherwise would. When the Athenians recalled him from Sicily to defend himself against a capital charge, while suspecting him in addition of being involved in a plot to establish a tyranny in Athens (VI 53, 60–61), he did not return to Athens, justly fearing that he would be killed as a matter of course without receiving a fair hearing; he had practically no choice but to escape to Sparta, to become a traitor to his fatherland, and, regardless of whether he had ever desired to become a tyrant, to embark on a policy of amazing versatility—playing the Spartans against the Athenians, the Persian king against both the Spartans and the Athenians, the Athenian oligarchs against the Athenian *demos,* and the Athenian *demos* against the Athenian oligarchs—which for some time made him the arbiter of all powers and which might have made him the monarch of Athens and not only of Athens.

Let us reconsider at this point the diagnosis of the Sicilian expedition which Thucydides indicates in his very eulogy of Pericles. The Sicilian expedition could have succeeded but for the fact that Pericles' successors were concerned more with their private good than with the common good: Alcibiades was driven to prefer his private good to the common good because the Athenian *demos* compelled him to become a traitor to Athens and to attempt to become her tyrant; the Sicilian expedition would have succeeded if the Athenian *demos* had trusted Alcibiades (VI 15.4). The earlier tyrannies (like that of Pisistratus and his sons) were indeed incompatible with empire; empire—at any rate the empire studied by Thucydides, the Athenian empire—is not possible without the full participation of the *demos* in political life; the *demos* is enthusiastically in favor of the grandest imperial enterprise ever undertaken by any Greek city but it ruins that enterprise by its folly; it brings about a situation in which it looks as if only Alcibiades, whom it distrusts and hates and whom it had driven to actions which in the case of any other man would be called desperate, could save the city by in effect becoming a tyrant. The Sicilian expedition would not have succeeded, it would not even have been attempted in the circumstances, under Pericles. To attempt such an enterprise and

to succeed in it, Athens needed a leader of greater stature, of a better *physis* than Pericles.[65] The Melian dialogue is connected with the Sicilian disaster by the same thought which connects the Funeral Speech with the plague: by the question regarding the precarious harmony between the public and the private.

The connection between the Melian dialogue and the Sicilian disaster is closer than that between the tyrant city and the tyrannical individual. The Athenians on Melos had but scorn for the Melians' hope for divine help to the just, for any hope for any divine help. They spoke indeed behind closed doors but to hear them one would believe that all Athenians shared their views. In fact however they spoke only for a part of Athens—for modern, innovating, daring Athens whose memory barely extends beyond Salamis and Themistocles. But precisely when the new Athens was put to its test through the Peloponnesian war, and therefore the rural population of Attica had to be uprooted, all Athenians were reminded most forcefully of their being rooted in remote antiquity, in an epoch when the belief in the ancestral gods was in its greatest vigor. The very Funeral Speech reminds one of the singular glory of Marathon as distinguished from Salamis.[66] The older stratum of Athens asserted itself—if in a "sophisticated" manner[67]—during the Peloponnesian war as narrated by Thucydides through Nicias who brought about the peace with Sparta called after him and who opposed the Sicilian expedition. Nicias can be said to be that leading and patriotic Athenian who came closest to holding the "Spartan" or "Melian" view as previously described. To see this one must follow his fate as it unfolds in Thucydides' pages. By doing so we shall arrive at a somewhat clearer understanding of Thucydides' manner of writing.

The first action of Nicias was an attack on an island close to Athens; the action was undertaken in the interest of Athens' safety against attacks from the sea; part of the action consisted in "liberating" the entrance for Athenian ships between the island and the mainland (III 51; cf. II 94.1). The Spartans had begun the war out of concern with their safety; they claimed to wage the war for the

[65] The praise of Antiphon's virtue (VIII 68.1) must be understood as part of the "Alcibiadean" context: Antiphon is not praised, as Brasidas and the Athenian tyrants are (IV 81.2, VI 54.5), for the fact that he possessed both virtue and (political) intelligence.

[66] I 73.2–74.4, II 14–16, 34.5, 36.1–3; cf. Plato, *Laws* 707b4–c6.

[67] Plato, *Laches* 197d.

"liberation" of the Greek cities from Athenian domination. We next find Nicias in charge of an unsuccessful attempt to reduce the island of Melos (III 91.1–3); Athenians of a different stamp succeed where Nicias failed. On the next occasion on which we hear of him, his enemy Cleon had made him responsible in the Athenian assembly for the fact that the Spartans cut off on the island of Sphacteria had not yet been reduced; in order to beat off the attack, Nicias, taking up a suggestion made by others, proposes that Cleon should go to Sphacteria and resigns his military command in favor of Cleon; he hoped as all other moderate men did that Cleon's expedition would be the end of the abominable demagogue (IV 27.5–28.5). Nicias hoped in vain; his apparently shrewd move merely led to Cleon's greatest triumph and therewith to the gravest defeat of the moderate Athenians; his move against Cleon foreshadows his move against Alcibiades in the debate about the Sicilian expedition: a move meant to be conducive to the cause of moderation assured the defeat of that cause. Nicias' fourth action is a campaign against Corinth which ended in a victory of no consequence; two facts are remarkable: the victory was due to the Athenian knights, and Nicias religiously took care that two Athenian corpses in the hands of the enemy were surrendered to the Athenians under a truce (IV 42–44). There are amazing parallels to both facts in the Athenian defeat in Sicily. It must suffice here to say that the inferiority of the Athenians in cavalry may have been the decisive reason for their Sicilian defeat—more important than the more startling blunders underlined by Thucydides. This military mistake was due equally to Nicias and to Alcibiades (VI 71.2; cf. 20.4, 21.2, 22, 25.2, 31.2 as well as the later references to cavalry in the account of the Sicilian expedition). It surely is in perfect harmony with the spirit of Thucydides' silent instruction not to mention that military blunder but merely to enable the reader to see it. And it is surely in perfect agreement with the spirit of Thucydides' quest for causes that he might find the decisive fault of the Sicilian defeat in an unspectacular blunder of the kind indicated—a blunder not unconnected indeed, as a moment's reflection shows, with the spectacular ones. In the year following Nicias was in charge of the conquest of an island inhabited by Spartan subjects; there was a battle but the resistance of the enemy was not strong; the vanquished were treated very mildly, not at all as the Melians were treated after their defeat; the conquest was easy thanks to Nicias' secret negotiations with some of the islanders (IV 53–54). The action foreshadows Nicias' policy with regard to

the Syracusans. Nicias' sixth action was undertaken against Brasidas; Nicias was at least partly responsible for the fact that the inhabitants of a city which had turned from the Athenian alliance to the Spartans were not butchered by the angry soldiery after its subjugation (IV 129–130). The last and most famous action of Nicias prior to the Sicilian expedition was the peace with Sparta which separates the two parts of the Peloponnesian war. This action was rendered possible by the deaths of Brasidas and Cleon. Through Cleon's death Nicias had become what he was eager to become, the leading man in Athens. He was eager for peace because he wished to give rest both to himself and to the city from the toils of war for the present and because for the future he did not wish to expose his hitherto untarnished good fortune to fortune's whims (V 16.1): there seems to be perfect harmony between his private interest and the public interest. But the peace proved very soon to be unstable, and Nicias was attacked as responsible for a peace which was allegedly not in the interest of Athens (V 46): leaders, to say nothing of others, are exposed to fortune's whims not only in war. Only after having shown us Nicias in such a large number of deeds of so great a variety does Thucydides let us hear a speech by Nicias. No other character is introduced by Thucydides in this manner; the unique introduction corresponds to Nicias' unique importance.[68]

In his first speech (VI 9–14) Nicias attempts to dissuade the

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[68] Cf. the report about a speech by Nicias in V 46.1. As for Brasidas, cf. II 86.6 (or 85.1) with the only preceding mention of him in II 25.2. The deeds of Alcibiades preceding his first speech are no less in number than Nicias' but they are less varied. The unique significance of Nicias consists in the fact that he is the representative *par excellence* of moderation in the city of daring. As the pious gentleman warrior who is concerned with his military renown and with omens, he represents also the class of readers primarily addressed by Thucydides whose work deals above all with war and with omens (cf. I 23.2–3); that work is best understood if one reads it as primarily addressed to the Niciases of the future generations, potential pillars of their cities who will be attracted as a matter of course by the account of the greatest war which was so great because of the large number of battles as well as of omens. Among those primary addressees there will be some who can learn to raise their sights beyond Nicias or who can ascend. That ascent will be guided in the first place by Thucydides' explicit praise of men other than Nicias: of Themistocles, Pericles, Brasidas, Pisistratus, Archelaus, Hermocrates, and Antiphon (cf. note 71 below). But it will also eventually be guided by Thucydides' praise, only silently conveyed, of Demosthenes and Diodotus.

Athenians from the Sicilian expedition. He makes that attempt a few days after they had already decided on the expedition and elected him against his will as one of the three commanders. There had been no change in popular sentiment between the two meetings of the assembly (cf. III 35.4): Nicias' success depends entirely on his power of persuasion. He begins his attempt to persuade the Athenians by suggesting that his self-interest would induce him to favor the expedition: he would derive honor from it since he would be a commander and he is less afraid than others to die; he opposes the expedition, then, because he is concerned exclusively with the common good. Yet, one might well say, how can he derive honor from being a commander of the expedition if the expedition cannot be crowned with success? Why then does he oppose it? In fact, he opposes it from self-interest—from a self-interest which in his view is as much in harmony with the common good in the case of the Sicilian expedition as it was in the case of the Peace of Nicias. He admits this in a way by adding at once that a good citizen ought to be concerned with his body and his property since precisely this concern makes him concerned with the well-being of the city. If he has any hope of success, he will try to persuade the city to preserve what it possesses and not to risk it for the sake of immanifest and future things; he will wish, that is, that the Athenians will act as he himself—the wealthy and famous Nicias who is completely satisfied with the wealth and the fame which he possesses—is prompted to act or that they will act in the Spartan manner (cf. I 70.2–3, VI 31.6). The enemy to be feared, he asserts, is Sparta, anti-democratic Sparta, and not Syracuse; the Spartans may use the opportunity supplied by the Athenians' entanglement in Sicily for no longer remaining at rest: the Athenians ought to remain at rest. He tries to make his hearers oblivious of the fact that the Spartans tend to remain at rest and that more than the Athenians' going to Sicily would be needed to stir them into action. Without foreseeing and willing it, he provides in a manner for this additional incentive. He can only hope that he will dissuade the Athenians from the expedition; to say the least, he must reckon with the possibility that, in accordance with the formal decision made in the preceding meeting of the assembly, he and Alcibiades will be in joint command of the expedition. Yet in order to dissuade the Athenians from the expedition, he discredits his fellow commander: Alcibiades is concerned only with his private good; he cannot be trusted. No one

can say whether or to what extent this attack on Alcibiades' character, which proved to be wholly ineffectual at the moment, contributed under other circumstances to the Athenians' recalling Alcibiades from Sicily and hence to the stirring of the Spartans into action against Athens; but no one can deny that Nicias' calumny of Alcibiades is in harmony with the manner in which the Athenians treated Alcibiades a short time later in manifest disregard of the interest of their city. Thucydides' judgment on Alcibiades from the point of view of civic virtue agrees with Nicias' judgment but, having reflected more deeply even than Pericles on the complex relation between private interest and the interest of the city, he is less sure than Nicias that Alcibiades' concern with his own aggrandizement is simply opposed to the interest of Athens, and he is quite sure that the success of the Sicilian expedition depended decisively on Alcibiades' participation in it on the side of the Athenians (VI 15). At any rate Alcibiades, who calls on the Athenians to act in the Athenian, not in the Spartan, manner convinces them that by entrusting the command of the expedition to him and Nicias jointly, they will make sure that his defects (if they are defects) are compensated not only by his outstanding virtues but by Nicias' virtue as well. In his second speech (VI 20–23) Nicias makes a last effort to dissuade the Athenians from the expedition by making clear to them the magnitude of the effort required to guarantee the success of the enterprise; he does not realize that in doing so he merely gives the Athenians what appears to them to be the most competent expert advice as to how they can achieve the end which they most passionately desire or that he proves the wisdom of Alcibiades according to whom the cooperation of Alcibiades' nature and Nicias' experience is needed for the success of the expedition. Nicias is obviously not fit to be the sole or even the chief commander of the expedition (cf. VII 38.2–3, 40.2). While the Athenians are engaged in preparing the expedition, they receive the first inkling of the impending disaster: a gross act of impiety is committed in Athens and this appeared to be a bad omen for the expedition in the eyes of the Athenians, the large majority of whom lacked the lights which distinguished the Athenian speakers on Melos; the popular fear of the gods is used against Alcibiades by those who compete with him for popular favor; but for certain calculations they would have impeached him for impiety at once; they will bring about his criminal prosecution within a very short time; while one has no right to assume that Nicias was involved in these follies,

one cannot deny that both the distrust of Alcibiades and the popular fear are in harmony with Nicias' way of thinking. For the time being, the preparations for the expedition are continued and completed; the expeditionary force sails. The Sicilian expedition surpasses everything undertaken by Pericles; whereas Pericles stood for love of the beautiful qualified by thrift, the Sicilian expedition, being in the style of Alcibiades whose fellow commander was the exceedingly rich Nicias, was inspired by love of the beautiful on the level of lavishness;[69] it reminded of Xerxes' expedition against Greece; yet after Alcibiades' recall, the man at the head of this proud enterprise will be the man less tainted by *hybris* than any of his Greek contemporaries. One must wonder whether Alcibiades' *hybris* would not have been more conducive to Athens' success than Nicias' lack of it. Despite Alcibiades' recall, the Athenians in Sicily were quite successful at first: Nicias was a competent general. In addition the third of the three commanders in charge of the expedition, Lamachus, was still alive, and no one can say to what extent the early successes of the Athenians against Syracuse were due to this man whom we had almost forgotten to mention and who was more given to daring than Nicias. But Alcibiades had stirred the Spartans into action and a Peloponnesian force was on its way for the relief of hard-pressed Syracuse. In addition, Lamachus had died fighting and Nicias had fallen sick. Yet Nicias, being now the sole commander and again underestimating the power of the abominable traitor Alcibiades, was more hopeful than ever before (VI 103–104). His hope is disappointed: the Peloponnesian force arrives and the situation of the Athenians in Sicily deteriorates rapidly. Yet Nicias is now in his element: no daring action is possible any more; the only way of salvation is inactivity and caution; but caution will lead to salvation only if the Athenians at home act quickly either by calling back the armament from Sicily very soon or by sending strong reinforcements very soon (VII 8, 11.3); apart from being cautious Nicias can only hope. Acting with utmost caution toward his own fellow citizens because he knows their natures (14.2, 4), he does not dare to tell them that the only safe course of action is the immediate recall of the armament from Sicily; he can only hope that they will draw this inference from his report about the situation in Sicily. This hope too is disappointed. The Athenians send strong reinforcements under Demosthenes who intends to avoid

[69] Cf. VI 31 with 12.2 and V 40.1; cf. also VII 28.1, 3, 4.

Nicias' mistake which consisted in lack of daring, but who fails in his daring effort because the enemy forces are already too strong. The only way of salvation is immediate return to Athens. Nicias opposes this course partly from fear of the Athenians, partly from hope that the Syracusans might still give in because of the enormity of the expense which they were incurring on account of the war. When the situation deteriorates still further, Nicias changes his mind; but just as the Athenians are about to withdraw, an eclipse of the moon occurs whereupon "the majority of the Athenians," with whom the excessively pious Nicias entirely agrees, at the advice of the soothsayers refuse to move until "three times nine" days have passed (50.3–4). As a consequence, the situation of the Athenians deteriorates still further. The wholly unexpected happens. Their navy is defeated by the Syracusan navy; the spirit of initiative, daring, and inventiveness by which the Athenians hitherto excelled has left them and now animates their enemies; the Athenians have become Spartans and the Athenians' enemies have become Athenians; the Syracusans see before them the prospect of a naval victory of the grandeur of Salamis; the Athenians are utterly discouraged. They attempt to escape by sea from the region of Syracuse where they had become besieged instead of the besiegers; the Syracusans are resolved to prevent their escape. Nicias attempts to encourage his utterly discouraged troops by a speech which, if read in the light of the deeds, conveys a single thought: the salvation of every one of you and of the city as a whole depends on your acting on the view the truth of which is known to you from experience, namely, that chance may for once be on our side. The ensuing naval battle in the harbor of Syracuse is watched with the utmost concern by the part of the land forces which had not embarked, especially by the Athenians whose feelings change from one extreme to the other as the naval battle, as far as they can observe it, changes from success of their compatriots to their failure. When the spectators see their side prevailing, they again become confident and turn to calling on the gods that they should not deprive them of salvation; only while they have hope based on the apparent strength of their human friends do they pray (71.3, 72.1; cf. II 53.4). Eventually the Syracusans prevail. The Athenian defeat was however not as disastrous as was thought by the bulk of the Athenians, who were now still more dejected than ever before. It was still possible for them to save themselves by retreating on land during the night, especially since the Syracusans were preoccupied

with a holy day—a day of sacrifice to Heracles—but a ruse of the statesmanly Hermocrates, which compensated for his fellow citizens' ill-timed piety, deceived the trusting Nicias into delaying the retreat until daybreak, *i.e.* until it was too late. Only two days after the naval battle do the Athenians begin their retreat, leaving their sick and wounded behind in a state of utmost misery; no one listens to the prayers of the latter although all their departing comrades are in tears despite the fact that they have suffered things, and are in fear of suffering things, terrible beyond tears (75.4). They had left Athens with high hopes and solemn prayers to the gods; now they express their despair in cursing the gods (75.7; cf. VI 32.1–2). Nicias however has not changed: he still has hope, he encourages the army to go on hoping and not to blame themselves overmuch. He presents himself as a model to them: he who was thought to be a favorite of chance is now in the same danger as the meanest of them and in addition very sick although he has spent his life in acting in many ways toward the gods according to custom and law and toward men justly and without arousing the envy of men or gods. He is hopeful for the future because he has led a virtuous life although he cannot deny that the present misery, which does not at all correspond to his merit, frightens him. Could it be true that there is no correspondence between piety and good fortune? Or is this misfortune only a part of the Athenians' misfortune, and are the Athenians not as guiltless as he himself? Surely not every Athenian present can look back at his life with the same satisfaction as Nicias; in particular most of those present had passionately desired the Sicilian expedition which Nicias had opposed; perhaps that expedition which reminded us of Xerxes' expedition against Greece, having been undertaken from *hybris* due to prosperity, has aroused the envy of some god; but surely by now we have been sufficiently punished. If the expedition was an unjust act, it was a human failing, and human failings are not punished excessively. We are now worthier of the gods' pity than of their envy. Nicias does not fail to add the remark that they are still strong enough to resist the enemy provided they keep order and discipline (77). Yet neither his piety and justice nor his generalship (cf. 81.3) can save the Athenians nor himself. When everything is lost he surrenders to the Spartan commander Gylippus, who is anxious to save him, one reason being that the Spartans were obliged to Nicias for his kindness toward the Spartans after Sphacteria and for the peace called after him; but Gylippus has to give in to Corinthian and

Syracusan pressures just as his countrymen had to give in to the Thebans' demand for the butchery of the Plataeans. "Nicias deserved least of the Greeks of my time to arrive at such a degree of misfortune because of his full devotion to the pursuit of virtue as understood by old established custom" (86.5). Thucydides' judgment on Nicias is precise, as precise as his judgment on the Spartans according to which the Spartans above all others succeeded in being moderate while prospering: both judgments are made from the point of view of those on whom he passes judgment. They are precise by being incomplete. His judgment on the Spartans does not reveal the cause of Spartan moderation and hence its true character. His judgment on Nicias does not reveal the true character of the connection between the fate of men and their morality. Nicias like the Spartans believed that the fate of men or cities corresponds to their justice and piety[70] (cf. VII 18.2), to the

[70] Cf. VII 18.2. Cf. the Athenian parallel in V 32.1 (*i.e.* near the center of Thucydides' account of the central year of the war as narrated by him); the Athenian reflection on the connection between injustice and adversity belongs to the time of Nicias' ascendancy. The difference between the Athenian ambassadors on Melos and the Athenian people is illustrated also by the negotiations between the Athenians and the Boeotians after the Athenian defeat at Delium. The Athenians had occupied and fortified a temple of Apollo. The Boeotian commander in his address to the troops before the battle points out the sacrilegious character of the Athenians' action and draws the conclusion that the gods will help the Boeotians (IV 92.7). The Athenians lose the battle. The Boeotians refuse to permit the Athenians to gather their dead on the ground that the Athenians had desecrated the temple at Delium; the Athenians attempt to show that the ground is specious (97–99). Thucydides' account of this controversy is considerably more extensive than his account of the battle. In his commentary on the passage Gomme remarks that "Thucydides is curiously interested in this sophistical stuff" and that "his insistence on this argument of words was due to his feeling that the Boeotian refusal to allow the Athenians to collect their dead was another evil result of the war—an abandonment of one of the recognized, and humane, usages of Greece." The "humane" usage was based on a specific piety, *i.e.* a specific understanding of the divine, and its status was therefore not fundamentally different from that of the prohibition against the pollution of temples; from the point of view of the Athenian ambassadors to Melos—or of Socrates—the fate of the corpses would be a matter of utter indifference. Thucydides' "curious interest" in the casuistry regarding sacral matters is a necessary consequence of his interest in the fundamental issue of Right and Compulsion to which the Athenians explicitly refer in their reply to the Boeotians (98.5–6). We see here again that Thucydides is more open-minded or takes less for granted than "the scientific historian."

practice of virtue as understood by old established custom. But this correspondence rests entirely on hope, on unfounded or vain hope.[71] The view set forth by the Athenians on Melos is true. Nicias, and the Athenians in Sicily with him, perished in the last analysis for the same reason that the Melians perished. This then is the connection between the Melian dialogue and the Sicilian disaster, the unique dialogue and the uniquely narrated deed: not indeed the gods, but the human concern with the gods without which there cannot be a free city, took terrible revenge on the Athenians. Just as the Athenians on Melos mistakenly assumed that the leading Melians, as distinguished from the Melian populace, would as a matter of course agree with their view of the divine (V 103.2–104) and hence of right, so they mistakenly assumed that the Athenian *demos* would never need a leader like the Melian leaders. Pericles, who would never have said what the Athenians on Melos say, would for the same reason never have undertaken the Sicilian expedition in the circumstances in which it was undertaken. Alcibiades, who might have said what the Athenians on Melos say, might have brought the Sicilian expedition to a happy issue. But Alcibiades' proved or presumed impiety made it necessary for the Athenian *demos* to entrust the expedition to a man of Melian beliefs whom they could perfectly trust because he surpassed every one of them in piety.

## 8. *The Spartan Manner and the Athenian Manner*

This much is clear: the theme "Sparta-Athens" is not only not exhausted but is barely touched by the question as to which of the two cities broke the treaty or compelled its antagonist to break the treaty, for unless it is kept back by weakness of one kind or another, every city is itself compelled to expand. This reason however justifies Athenian imperialism in the same way in which it justifies the imperialism of Persia or of Sparta. By implication it justifies the dominion of the rich over the poor or vice versa as well as tyranny. In other words this reason does not do justice to the truth intended by the "Spartan" praise of moderation and the divine law.

[71] Therefore Nicias' virtue is not unqualified; it is law-bred, in contradistinction to the virtue of Brasidas (IV 81.2), the Athenian tyrants (VI 54.5), and Antiphon (VIII 68.1).

Besides, the meaning of "compulsion" is not quite clear: the Melians were not compelled to submit to the Athenians. But one might say that if the alternative to submission is extinction, submission is compulsory or necessary for sensible men. The Athenians at the time of Salamis were not compelled to submit to the Persians because they had a considerable navy, the most intelligent leader Themistocles and the most daring zeal (I 74.1–2); does this mean that given these conditions they were compelled to fight? Surely once they had fought and won and then wished to prevent the recurrence of the extreme danger from which they had saved themselves, they were compelled to embark on their imperial policy. The very least one would have to say is that there are different kinds of compulsion.

The statements of the Athenians on Melos are so shocking because they justify their empire and hence their action against Melos ultimately by nothing except the natural necessity by virtue of which the strong—anyone who is strong—rules the weak and thus treat every consideration of right—such as the higher right of Athenian imperialism as contrasted with the imperialism of any barbaric power—with utmost disdain. Only toward the end of the dialogue do they mention in passing as a matter too obvious for emphasis that their demand on the Melians keeps within reasonable limits. Yet even these Athenians cannot help indicating that Athenians are men of a different character than Spartans. The Spartans, they say, in their dealings with foreigners, more patently than all other men they know regard the pleasant as noble and the expedient as just; since expediency, to say nothing of pleasure, calls for safety and only the just and the noble induce one to seek dangers, the Spartans generally speaking are least inclined to take dangerous courses (V 105.4, 107). The Athenians in other words do not patently or simply identify in their dealings with non-Athenians the pleasant with the noble and the expedient with the just; they are somehow concerned with the noble or beautiful in every respect; in the words of Pericles, they love the beautiful; the daring for which they are famous is not bestial or savage or mad but is inspired by generous sentiments. This suggestion is more shocking than everything else which the Athenians on Melos say or suggest because it is so flagrantly contradicted by the ensuing butchery of the Melians, although it must be admitted that that disgraceful action does not necessarily follow from the principles stated by the ambassadors and that,

as far as we know, the ambassadors were not responsible for that action. What the Athenians on Melos say about the peculiarity of the Spartans and hence indirectly about the Athenians compels us to say that the atrocity committed afterward is so shocking precisely because it was committed by Athenians and not by Spartans; one must demand more from Athenians than from Spartans because the Athenians are men superior to the Spartans. Even the Athenians on Melos are witnesses to this superiority for more than one reason. The Athenians in Sparta are less ambiguous witnesses to the same fact. The latter are indeed compelled to justify the Athenian empire. They must show "what kind of city" Athens is and that she is worthy of imperial rule: she was compelled to acquire the empire and she is compelled to preserve it, but what compelled and compels her to do so is not merely fear and profit but also something noble, honor; accordingly she exercises her imperial rule in a juster, more restrained, less greedy manner than her power would permit her to do and the same power will lead others in her place in fact to do. What the Athenians in Sparta stated in order to prevent the outbreak of the war is completed on the grandest scale in Athens by Pericles in his Funeral Speech for the purpose of showing that Athens more than any other city is worth dying for. Athens differs from all other cities—the cities which resemble her merely imitate her—in such a way that she above all others deserves to rule an empire. The qualities which distinguish her are those which Sparta above all others lacks: generosity without pettiness or calculation, freedom, generous gaiety and ease, courage in war which stems not from compulsion, dictation, and harsh discipline but from generosity, in brief, a well-tempered love of the noble and the beautiful. In other words, the ultimate justification of the Athenian empire is less compulsion, fear, or profit than everlasting glory—a goal to the pursuit of which the Athenians are not compelled, or with which they are not obsessed, but to which they have freely and fully dedicated themselves.[72]

But let us turn from the speeches to the more trustworthy deeds or facts. The first outstanding fact—first certainly in time—which Thucydides presents and which is most obviously relevant to the issue now under consideration is the contrast between the Spartan

[72] By the last sentence I have tried to bring out Pericles' implicit reply to what the Corinthians say in I 70.8–9.

king Pausanias and the Athenian Themistocles. They were the most famous men among the Greeks of their time, in the forefront of the fight against Persia, and both ended ignominiously after having betrayed Greece to Persia. Thucydides does not pass judgment on their acts of treason. Themistocles became the founder of the Athenian empire through his superior intelligence, versatility, and guile; Pausanias involuntarily and against Sparta's interest drove the other Greeks who needed protection from Persia into the arms of Athens by his stupid violence and tyrant-like injustice. Pausanias wrote to the Persian king because he was trying to become the ruler of Greece with the help of the Persian king; Themistocles had been ostracized by the Athenians and wrote to the Persian king only when he was compelled to do so by persecution on the part of Sparta and Athens. When Pausanias' un-Spartan conduct came to the notice of the authorities in Sparta, they called him home and he returned: he was nothing without Sparta, without his hereditary position in Sparta; the Spartans had very strong grounds—grounds which had the force of proofs—for suspecting him of high treason. But in accordance with the supreme fairness which they customarily practice among themselves, they did not start criminal proceedings against him until they had proof beyond a shadow even of unreasonable doubt. No such consideration was given to the leading Athenians in Athens. Thanks to her regime, Sparta was less threatened by outstanding individuals or potential tyrants than Athens was or believed to be. Themistocles may have been dangerous to Athens; Pausanias was never a danger to Sparta. Nor was Themistocles compelled to return to Athens; he was something without Athens; for he owed most of his power to his nature as distinguished not only from *nomos* but from any other kind of imparted knowledge; his superior nature (his "genius") would assert itself everywhere, in Persia as well as in Greece; Pausanias, on the other hand, while in no way outstanding by his nature—Thucydides has nothing to say about his nature—owed all his power to law, and any virtue he possessed to the strict discipline of Sparta which was wholly ineffective when he was away from Sparta. Sparta may have been a better city than Athens; Athens surpassed her by far by natural gifts, by her individuals.[73]

Thucydides presents to us a galaxy of outstanding Athenians—

[73] I 90.3–91, 93.3–4, 95–96.1, 128–138. Cf. Plato, *Laws* 642c6–d1.

outstanding by intelligence or sheer cleverness and efficiency, by nobility of character or *hybris*—and only a single outstanding Spartan, Brasidas. Sparta was less threatened by outstanding men than Athens because she had so few of them; the Spartans were members of a herd rather than individuals; Sparta did not, like Athens, bring forth lions.[74] How petty and how poor does the Spartan traitor Pausanias look in contrast with the Athenian traitors Themistocles and Alcibiades. It goes without saying that there is no Spartan whom one could for one moment dream of comparing to Pericles, who appears to be unrivalled even among the Athenians of his time as Thucydides indicates in the following manner: Pericles' speeches are the only speeches delivered in Athens by an Athenian which do not form part of pairs of speeches (cf. I 139.4). As for Brasidas, the exception to the rule, he confirms the rule; he is the Athenian among the Spartans; he is the only Thucydidean character who ever makes a dedication to Athena and apparently sacrifices to her (IV 116.2, V 10.2; cf. II 13.5). He surpasses the other Spartans not only by his intelligence, initiative, ability to speak, and justice but also by his mildness (IV 81, 108.2–3, 114.3–5). He is the only Thucydidean character praised by the author for his mildness. This praise must be rightly understood. Men like Nicias and Demosthenes were no less mild than Brasidas. Brasidas' mildness deserved praise not only in contrast with the violence of his Athenian antagonist, Cleon, but above all because mildness was so rare among Spartans as distinguished from Athenians. Cleon is the counterpart of Brasidas because just as Brasidas is the Athenian among the Spartans, Cleon is in a sense the Spartan among the Athenians. As we observed earlier, in another sense Nicias is the Spartan among the Athenians. Thucydides respects Nicias or at any rate is friendly towards him whereas he loathes Cleon. Cleon betrays the soul of Athens. His version of imperialism is not ennobled by any thought of everlasting glory. In his view imperialism is irreconcilable with any thought of generous compassion or any pleasure deriving from speeches. His imperialism is guided solely by considerations of the profitable or expedient. He does appeal to justice but only to punitive justice to be inflicted by Athens on her faithless allies—a kind of justice which in his view coincides with Athens' interest. He has only contempt for the love of glory and generosity and the love of

[74] Plato, *Laws* 666e1–7; Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1431–1432.

speeches for which Pericles had praised Athens by speaking of her "love of beauty and love of wisdom" as distinguishing her specially from Sparta. Owing to his great credit with the *demos* Cleon can openly call democracy in question in an assembly of the Athenian *demos,* something that Alcibiades can do only in a Spartan assembly. Like a Spartan he condemns the generous desire of the Athenians to spare the lives of the Mytileneans by appealing to the moderation which shows itself in unquestioning submission to the wisdom of the law, *i.e.* to unchangeable laws of questionable goodness. The gist of his only speech may be said to be that the proposal to spare the Mytileneans is so manifestly absurd that the proposers cannot have had any other motive except to exhibit their cleverness by defending a manifest absurdity and that those who might vote for the proposal cannot have had any other motive except to express their admiration for that cleverness.[75] He is severely punished for his contempt of speeches. Before the battle of Amphipolis, Cleon, who had condemned the Athenians for being enamored of being "lookers-at" of speeches and of sophists, turned to "look at" the place and its environs, whereas Brasidas made a speech to his troops and won the battle (V 7.3–4, 10.2–5; III 38.4, 7). Yet however irrational Cleon may have been on this and other occasions he is reasonableness itself compared with the Spartan Alcidas whom the Spartans trusted more than they did Brasidas. Following the Spartan practice, he killed the Athenian allies whom he had taken prisoner; he stopped the slaughter immediately when some friends of Sparta drew his attention to the fact that he did not promote the liberation of the Greeks from Athenian domination by killing men who had never lifted their hands against the liberating Peloponnesians and were Athenian allies only under duress; if he did not stop his practice he would convert many who were at present friends of Sparta into her enemies (III 32; cf. II 67.4). Alcidas was not cruel; he did not kill because he enjoyed killing; he killed because Spartans always killed in such circumstances, as a matter of custom and of course. We see him gaping when the friends of Sparta suggest to him their simple thought; he is intelligent enough to grasp its truth. What is meant to amaze us is the fact that this simple thought had never occurred to him or to any other Spartan with the exception of Brasidas, who

[75] III 37–38; 40.2, 4. Cf. I 71.3 and 84.3.

was at that time still entirely powerless.[76] Alcidas is as much below Cleon as Cleon is below Demosthenes and Nicias. Thucydides does not pass judgment on Alcidas' callousness, whereas he does pass judgment on Cleon's violence: he knows what he can expect from Spartans on the one hand and from Athenians on the other.

These observations receive powerful support from the contrast between the Spartans' dealings with the conquered Plataeans and the Athenians' dealings with the conquered Mytileneans (III 52–68). Both actions are judicial. The crime of which the Spartans judge is Plataeae's loyalty to Athens, *i.e.* a line of conduct which is criminal only on the basis of the assumption, questioned soon after by the Spartans themselves, that the cause of Sparta is identical with the cause of justice; the crime of which the Athenians judge is Mytilene's admitted breach of her treaty with Athens. The Plataeans are condemned and executed without a single voice except their own being raised in their favor before the Spartan tribunal; the Mytileneans are first condemned but then when the Athenians regret their cruel decision, the case for the Mytileneans is as powerfully stated by an Athenian as was the case against them, with the result that they have a hairbreadth escape. The issue debated before the Spartan tribunal is exclusively whether the Plataeans were just or unjust, guilty or innocent; both the Plataeans and their accusers, the Thebans, defend themselves against the charge of injustice and accuse the other party of injustice (III 60, 61.1, 63 beginning); the issue debated in the Athenian assembly is not exclusively or even chiefly whether the Mytileneans were guilty or innocent but whether it is expedient for Athens to kill all of them indiscriminately: the Athenians in contradistinction to the Spartans assume that killing must serve a purpose other than the satisfaction of the desire for revenge. There is a certain resemblance between the position taken by the Thebans who demand the killing of the Plataeans and Cleon who demands the killing of the Mytileneans—both the Thebans and Cleon do not like "fine speeches" (III 67.6–7 and

[76] III 79.3 (cf. 69.1 and 76; cf. III 93 end with 92.5 end [Alcidas is in the center]). Cf. also II 86.6 (the Spartan commanders call the soldiers together and then, seeing the mood of the soldiers, decide to address them) and 88.3 (Phormio sees the mood of the soldiers and then calls them together in order to address them). Cf. the reference to "seeing" in Phormio's speech (89.1, 8) and the silence about it in the Spartans' speech. The theme "seeing" is not dropped in the narrative of the battle which follows on these speeches.

37–38); nevertheless Cleon's Athenian opponent, Diodotus, has something important in common with Cleon which distinguishes both Athenians from the Spartans and their allies: both demand that not only the fact of the crime but also the wisdom of punishing it capitally be considered. It goes without saying that the Spartans do not execute the Plataeans out of blind obedience to a divine law or the demands of justice but from concern with their immediate self-interest; they give in to the Thebans' hatred of the Plataeans because they regard the Thebans as useful to them for the war (III 68.4) or, as the Plataeans put it and as the Athenian ambassadors on Melos will repeat, the Spartans define justice as their present convenience (III 56.3, V 105.4). However shocking the Athenians' later action against the Melians may be, the Athenians surely did not act hypocritically as the Spartans did toward the Plataeans. The Spartans, one is tempted to say, are petty calculators even when they act justly whereas the Athenians are of generous frankness in their very crimes since they do not even attempt to disguise their crimes as acts of justice. The Athenians, who ally themselves with the Messenians, do not claim, as they might have done, to wage the war in order to liberate the Messenians from Spartan tyranny; the Athenians' enemies, who claim to wage a war of liberation against the tyrant city of Athens in the same spirit in which they do not tolerate tyrants within cities, restore as a matter of course a tyrant whom the Athenians had deposed (II 30.1, 33.1–2; cf. I 122.3). Thucydides expresses his judgment on Sparta's claim to wage a war of liberation against Athens in the following manner. He states the case for that claim, *i.e.* for the Spartans' claim that they are waging a just war, most forcefully immediately after his account of the Thebans' peacetime attack on Plataeae and immediately before his account of the first Spartan invasion of Attica, *i.e.* between his accounts of the "Peloponnesians'" decisive breaches of the treaty (II 8.4–5).[77] The only Spartan who through his whole conduct gives some weight to the

[77] He follows a similar procedure in his first two statements about Pericles' unique position in Athens (I 127.3 and 139.4); in the first statement he does not praise Pericles whereas he does in the second; between the two statements he gives his account of Cylon and of Pausanias-Themistocles; the account in the center indicates the reason for Pericles' outstanding qualities; the center illuminates what precedes it and what follows it. In the example discussed in the text the center is illuminated by what precedes it and what follows it.

Spartan claim is Brasidas. Compared with the Spartan claim which was an attempt to lift the Peloponnesian war to the heights of the Persian war, the Athenian (Periclean) conception of the war is sobriety itself: the war serves no other purpose than to preserve the empire; the conception appeals to the intelligence rather than to desire, fear, or other passions. Thucydides' description of the Peloponnesian war as the greatest war because of the greatness of the sufferings which it brought agrees more with the Periclean than with the Spartan conception: the splendor of this war is to be found in the speeches rather than in the deeds. It would be a gross exaggeration to say that the Spartans' concern with justice or piety was merely hypocritical; they feared the gods genuinely; that fear induced them sometimes to spare the lives of their helpless enemies or to be mild as in the case of the Helots of Ithome (I 103.2–3) who appeared to be protected by an oracle. The Plataeans, as distinguished from those Helots, were not protected by an oracle but at most only by ancient oaths. The Athenians did not need oaths or oracles in order to save the Mytileneans; their mildness or generosity came from their manner or their souls.

One may try to strengthen the case for Sparta by pointing to such Athenian atrocities as their complicity in the treacherous slaughter of the upper-class Corcyreans (IV 46–48) who were surely inimical to Athens—an atrocity of which one may nevertheless say that it does not rival the Spartans' treacherous slaughter of the finest men among the Helots who had distinguished themselves in fighting Sparta's war (IV 80.2–5). Yet there is surely a kind of Athenian atrocity which has no parallel in Sparta: the Athenians' savage rage against each other after the mutilation of the Hermae and the profanation of the mysteries (VI 53.1–2, 60). In this case at any rate the fear of the gods which restrained the Spartans from savagery drove the Athenians into savagery. Especially if one considers this action in the context of the Athenians' treatment of their leading citizens in general, one becomes again inclined to say that Sparta was a better city than Athens. From this point it is only one step to saying that, in spite or because of their radical antagonism of manners, Sparta and Athens were worthy antagonists not only because they were the most powerful Greek cities but because each was in its own way of outstanding nobility. One may find a confirmation for this view in the following story. Contrary to the Greek notion of Spartan manliness according to which a Spartan would

rather die than give up his arms, the Spartan survivors of the fighting on Sphacteria surrendered to the Athenians and their allies; the captors could not believe that their captives were of the same kind as the Spartans who had fallen; one of the Athenian allies therefore asked one of the captives out of spite if the slain were perfect gentlemen; the Spartan replied that a spindle (meaning an arrow), *i.e.* a woman's tool, would be worth much if it could distinguish between true men and others, thus indicating that it was a matter of chance who had been hit by a missile and who had not (IV 40). It is gratifying to see that the mean question which called forth the laconic reply was not raised by an Athenian.

This is the place for two general remarks. As has often been said, Thucydides is concerned with "causes"—with those of the Peloponnesian war as well as those of all particular incidents of that war. The statement is correct provided one means that the most important causes are for him such things as the character of Sparta on the one hand and of Athens on the other, and that this kind of cause is understood by him less as the product of conditions (climatic, economic, etc.) than as the specification of the most comprehensive "causes," *i.e.* motion and rest. Causes in Thucydides' sense are not merely "material" and "efficient." For Thucydides the course of the war is the self-revelation of Sparta and Athens rather than the outcome of a strategy. Secondly, for the understanding of the superiority of the Athenian manner to the Spartan manner one cannot rely on the Funeral Speech, which expresses Thucydides' view only through the deflecting medium of Pericles' turn of mind. In Pericles' view Athens does not need a Homer or whoever by his poems gives delight for the moment, not because like Thucydides he disdains boasting or chanting Athens' praises but because he himself regards himself as superior to Homer and the other poets in magnifying and adorning. Thucydides too exaggerates, especially when he says that the Peloponnesian war affected "so to speak the greatest part of mankind," but how far does he remain behind Pericles who says that "all (kinds of) things from every land" are imported into Athens and that the Athenians have opened for themselves "every sea and land" and have left "everywhere" everlasting memorials of bad things and good.[78] Pericles' speech is a public, political, popular utterance whereas Thucydides' speech is "politic"

[78] I 1.2, 21.1, 22.4, II 38.2, 41.4, 42.1–2, 62.1.

in Hobbes's sense. The Funeral Speech is the greatest document of the harmony between Pericles and the city of Athens and especially its *demos,* which trusts him as much as it is capable; his superior intelligence is manifest to the *demos* because it is intelligible to the *demos;* he is, so to speak, an open book for the *demos;* when they disagree with him they see very soon that the disagreement was due entirely to their weakness or confusion;[79] his superiority is obvious, unambiguous, not like the ambiguous superiority of Themistocles and Alcibiades. Pericles justly occupies the center of the triptych the outer figures of which (Themistocles and Alcibiades) are superior to him only by nature but not by law. The extremes end in disaster; Pericles' end is inconspicuous—as "normal" as his life. As for his Funeral Speech, one must not in reading it forget for one moment the fundamental harmony between Pericles and the Athenian *demos* or between Pericles' private good and the common good of Athens as he and most Athenians understood it. When reading, for instance, the unforgettable sentences about the Athenians' love of beauty or nobility and their love of wisdom, or about the whole city of Athens being the school of Greece, one ought not to think of Sophocles and Anaxagoras but of what the average Athenian was likely to think when he heard these sentences or, which is the same, of the things to which Pericles explicitly refers in the very context. It is no small part of Thucydides' art that the reader is almost irresistibly tempted not to take this precaution.

The treatment of the Plataeans and of the Mytileneans shows us the contrast between Sparta and Athens as judges; Pylos and Sicily show us the contrast between Sparta and Athens in adversity. The opening part of the account of the Athenian action at Pylos (IV 3–6) is surrounded by accounts of Athenian failures in Sicily and in Chalcidice: Pylos was the right place for reaching a favorable decision of the war. Pylos had been chosen by the daring and versatile Demosthenes who could learn from his mistakes and who at the time when he brought about the seizure of Pylos had no official position. Thanks to this thoroughly un-Spartan man, the Athenians succeeded in beating the Spartans at their own game; they defended

[79] In his eulogy of Pericles Thucydides says (II 65.9) that when Pericles saw the Athenians "out of season insolently bold, he would with his orations put them into a fear"; Thucydides characteristically gives no example of a Periclean speech of this description. Cf. pages 152–53 above.

the Spartan territory which they had occupied by fighting as land soldiers against a Spartan naval attack (12.3; cf. 14.3) with the result that more than 300 Spartans were cut off on the island of Sphacteria. The apprehended disaster—the apprehension of the capture or killing of the cut-off Spartan force—sufficed to induce the Spartans to sue for peace without having had the benefit of Apollo's advice, *i.e.* to do something which the Athenians had been induced to do against the advice of Pericles by an actual disaster of an entirely different order of magnitude, namely, the plague. The true parallel to the Spartan action after their defeat at Pylos is however the Athenian action after their defeat in Sicily. The Sicilian disaster, of which everyone thought that it had brought down Athens, only called forth a still greater Athenian war effort. Under the influence of Cleon the Athenians decline the Spartan request for peace. Thucydides does not pass judgment on the Athenian response nor on the Spartan request, for no judgment is implied in his recording the fact that the strongest opponent of peace with Sparta was Cleon. Cleon was indeed, as Thucydides says in a different context, the most violent Athenian citizen and Thucydides strongly disapproved of his posture toward the Mytileneans (III 36.4, 6; 49.4); but this does not prove that in his opinion Cleon was always wrong and in particular that he was wrong in not acceding to the Spartan request for peace after Pylos. After all, Cleon's leading opponent on this occasion was Nicias, a man distinguished by decency rather than by wisdom or daring. Nor does Thucydides call into question Cleon's judgment regarding the Spartan peace offer by showing him somewhat later in a most laughable posture, for apart from the fact that Cleon, and not his laughing opponents, had the last laugh, the question in the latter scene concerns, not Cleon's political judgment but his strategic judgment which, to the extent to which it was guided by Demosthenes' judgment, proved to be excellent. To this one must add that it is, to say the least, doubtful whether Demosthenes' sound advice would have been of any avail but for Cleon's laughable, even mad (IV 39.3), but firm action in the Athenian assembly.[80] Thucydides might seem to pass unfavorable judgment on the Athenian response to the Spartan peace offer by saying that the response was due to the Athenians' "desire for

[80] IV 28–30. For the action on Sphacteria Demosthenes' experience in Aetolia was important; cf. not only IV 30.1 but also III 97.2–98.5, IV 28.4 and 32–34.

more," to a desire mentioned disapprovingly by the Spartan ambassadors to Athens in their speech (21.2, 17.4) and disapproved for the duration of the Peloponnesian war by Pericles himself (I 144.1, II 65.7). Yet, as we have seen, Thucydides distinguished between wisdom and its opposite not simply in accordance with Spartan notions of moderation or the Periclean notion of what could safely be done during the Peloponnesian war. It is undoubtedly significant that Thucydides uses in this context an expression used in the same context first by the Spartans: he is doing his best to look at the Pylos affair from the Spartan point of view. This is the reason why he apparently minimizes the Spartan breaches of the local armistice at Pylos (23.1) and above all why he seems to treat Demosthenes' brilliant success as a gift of chance. The Spartans treat that success in this manner however not merely in order to detract from their enemy's glory but above all because they believe in the connection between chance or luck and the gods and in particular between bad luck and divine punishment: it is precisely in their speech at Athens that they express for the first time some doubt as to who began the war, *i.e.* broke the sworn treaty (IV 20.2), and it is precisely their adversity at Pylos more than anything else which made them believe that their bad luck was a deserved punishment for their breach of the treaty (VII 18.2). Thucydides makes clear in his account of the fighting at Pylos that he does not share the view of chance presupposed by the Spartan view; he there characterizes as a reversal of chance what he explains to have been no more than an action by the Spartans and Athenians that was in contradiction to the opinion about the two cities which prevailed at the time (IV 12.2). Or, as his Pericles puts it, "we are accustomed to hold chance responsible whenever something happens against calculation."[2] To return to the present subject, however laughable Cleon's conduct in the Athenian assembly might have been, his conduct on Sphacteria was not. More seriously laughable than anything Cleon did was the unconditional surrender of the survivors of the 300 Spartans on Sphacteria if it is compared with the noble conduct of the Spartans at Thermopylae and with the Spartans' claim regarding themselves as that claim was generally understood (IV 36.3, 40.1). Thucydides alludes to this disproportion in the following manner: whereas he and everyone else always

[2] I 140.1. Cf. II 91.3–4 with the reference to chance in the Peloponnesians' speech (87.2) and the silence about it in Phormio's speech. Cf. *Wasps* 62.

called the Spartans on Sphacteria "men" (*hoi andres*), he calls them "human beings" (*anthropoi*) when he shows their helplessness as they are at the mercy of light-armed soldiers who are never more than mere "human beings."[82] This allusion differs from the mean taunt directed by an Athenian ally against the Spartans captured at Sphacteria by the fact that it is in no way directed against the Spartans who fought so well on Sphacteria but against the city of Sparta. Perhaps the harshest indictment of the Spartans is supplied by the fact that but for the defeat at Pylos (and the Athenian conquest of Cythera—IV 55), they would never have deviated from their customary practice to the extent of permitting a man of Brasidas' qualities to make his campaign in the north and hence would never have waged the war in the spirit of a war of liberation: a great panic, caused by a (relatively) petty defeat, not alleviated by Athenian willingness to forget who started the war and who abetted the butchery of the Plataeans, compelled the Spartans to tolerate for a short while, as long as was absolutely necessary, a generous policy. By his successes and his death Brasidas removed that compulsion and rendered possible the Peace of Nicias and therewith the return to Sparta of the prisoners taken on Sphacteria. Yet Brasidas' success was not Sparta's success. How little the Greeks believed that Sparta had been cleansed from the disgrace of Pylos by Brasidas' success is shown by the fact that in their view Sparta was rehabilitated only by her victory at Mantinea: only in the light of the victory at Mantinea did the Spartans' failure at Pylos appear to the other Greeks as having been caused by ill-luck and not by decay (V 75.3).

The battle of Mantinea took place in the central year of the Peloponnesian war, which lasted for twenty-seven years. The Spartans were at war with Argos while the Athenians were allied with both Sparta and Argos but in fact fighting on the side of Argos. There had almost been a battle between the Spartans and the Argives earlier in the year, but at the last moment the Spartan king Agis and two Argive generals had concluded on their own a four-month armistice. Agis' action was strongly resented by the Spartans with the result that they made an entirely new law according to which the king's power of making decisions was subject to control

[82] IV 34.2; cf. 33.2 and 38.3–4. Cf. also II 5.4–6.4 and III 97.2–98.4. Cf. note 26 above.

by ten councilors elected by the city and accompanying him on the campaigns (V 63). The new law of course did not affect the law concerning the order of battle. Owing to the suddenness with which the enemy appeared on the battlefield of Mantinea, if not to the further fact that the Spartans were more frightened than ever before in their memory, every one of them eagerly took his place, well known to him in the traditional order of the army which Thucydides describes in the center of his account of the fourteenth year of the war.[83] He was able to describe the order in which the

[83] At the end of III Thucydides mentions the eruption of Mt. Aetna which took place in the spring before he mentions the end of the winter. "The reason for this superficially illogical writing is clear: Thucydides did not want to begin a new 'book' with the mention of an incident, the eruption of Etna, which, worth recording for its own sake, had nothing to do with the war; it was best to tuck it away at the end of a 'book', even if that meant, strictly, putting it in its wrong year . . ." Gomme II 704. Assuming that Gomme means by a "book" the account of one year of the war, one must say that Thucydides begins his account of the eighth year of the war with the mention of an eclipse of the sun and of an earthquake—of natural phenomena which also occurred in the spring and which also had apparently nothing to do with the war. The end of III is the end of the account of the sixth year, of the only year the account of which both almost begins (III 89) and literally ends with the mention of natural phenomena; the account of the fifth year almost ends with the mention of a natural phenomenon (III 88.3). The transition from the fifth to the sixth year is the center of the first part of the war (cf. V 20). (The distinction between the natural and that which is not natural, *i.e.* above all the conventional, would seem to be the key to Thucydides' "philosophy of history," to a teaching silently conveyed through a narrative which affects to come as close as possible to a mere chronicle. The distinction mentioned is reflected in Thucydides' following the "natural" calendar ["according to summers and winters" —V 20.2–3, 26.1] which is the same for Spartans and Athenians, for Greeks and Persians, as distinguished from any "conventional" and hence necessarily local calendar. An oracle had predicted that the war would last thrice nine years [26.4]. Thucydides opens his narrative of the tenth year [and only of that year] with the account of an act of piety [V 1] on the part of the Athenians—of an act apparently connected with their sense of guilt [cf. V 32]. In that account he refers back to an earlier event by using the phrase "as I have made clear before," a phrase which occurs otherwise only in VI 94.1, *i.e.* the beginning of the account of the eighteenth year of the war; near the end of that account Thucydides speaks of the Spartan sense of guilt regarding the war [VII 18.2, 4]. [For the connection between V 1 and VI 94.1, cf. also I 13.6.] Cf. also note 70 above. Another hint is conveyed by the fact that Thucydides ends his account of each year sometimes with the phrase "this is the end of the *n*th year of the war" and sometimes with the phrase "this is the end of the *n*th year of the war which Thucydides has described.")

two opposed armies were arranged but not to state the number of fighters on each side: the number of the Spartans was unknown because of the secretiveness that was due to their regime, and the number of the others was concealed by their boasting. Yet since the Spartan order never changes, Thucydides can figure out, or enable his reader to figure out, the exact number of the Spartans who took part in the battle.[84] The Spartans do not seem to have been aware of the tension between secrecy and an unchangeable order or of the fact that such a disorderly thing as unregulated boasting can be more conducive to concealing the truth than any regulations. Or, to take a less ridiculous example, while the Spartans succeeded in concealing the manner in which they made 2,000 brave Helots vanish from sight, they did not succeed in concealing the fact that they had destroyed them (IV 80.4), since human beings who are alive are likely to come to sight from time to time. It is no accident that the two sole examples which Thucydides adduces in order to show the ignorance of Greeks regarding contemporary things are Spartan (I 20.3): Spartan secretiveness leads to ignorance regarding things Spartan, and given this ignorance one does not, for obvious reasons, run a great risk in praising the Spartans. Let us also remember here the Spartans' ridiculous concern with the ritual impurity of Pericles. To return to the battle of Mantinea, whereas Sparta's enemies advanced with passion, the Spartans advanced slowly in accordance with their law.[85] Agis, observing a danger which arises in every battle, tries to avert it by giving novel orders without being interfered with by any of the ten new councilors (cf. V 65.2). Two Spartan officers refuse to obey (from cowardice, as their accusers successfully claimed afterward). As a consequence of their complete lack of experience (for the commands were completely new and the new guardians of the old were not effective), the Spartans would have lost the battle but for the courage which they displayed at the critical moment (70–72.2). We note in passing that Sparta lost the fruit of the splendid victory in the year following (82–83). Thucydides does not claim that his description of the battle of Mantinea is quite exact; the truth of the description is comparable to the truth of the speeches;

[84] V 66–68. Cf. V 74 end and II 39.1.
[85] Cf. IV 108.6.

this may be one reason why he gives only summaries of the speeches with which the commanders addressed their troops before the battle (69, 74.1). At any rate the section of his work which shows the complete restoration of Sparta's renown and exhibits the beauty of her order of battle, *i.e.* which is most in accordance with the praise of Sparta near the beginning and near the end of his work, reveals at the same time most clearly and specifically Spartan ineptness, the Spartan comedy.

The battle of Mantinea is succeeded by the dialogue between the Athenians and the Melians which in its turn is succeeded by the Sicilian expedition. The dialogue on Melos separates the Spartan comedy from the Athenian tragedy. Thucydides as it were bids us compare "Sicily" with "Pylos" (VII 71.7) on the one hand and with "Mycalessus" (VII 29–30) on the other. Compared with the fate of the Athenians in Sicily, the fate of the Spartans on Sphacteria is indeed laughable. The fate of Mycalessus on the other hand is no less worthy of compassion than that of the Athenians in Sicily. Yet the latter is more deeply moving than the former. The reason would seem to be that the Mycalessians in no way deserved their unfathomable misfortune by any act of *hybris* whereas the Athenian disaster was the consequence of grave mistakes, of guilt: Sicily follows immediately on Melos. No one can read Thucydides' account of the Sicilian disaster with the feeling that the Athenians got what they deserved; to say the least, the disaster was not proportionate to the fault; this feeling is expressed by Nicias in accordance with his way of thinking (VII 77.1, 3–4). Of Nicias Thucydides says that he deserved his misfortune least of all the Greeks of his time (VII 86.5). He suggests a similar judgment regarding the Athenians. Yet the case of the Athenians is radically different from that of Nicias. Nicias did not deserve his misfortune because of his full dedication to law-bred virtue. Athens' nobility was of an entirely different kind, of a nobler kind. The Sicilian expedition, undertaken against the will of Nicias, originated in the nobility of her daring—of her willingness to risk everything for the sake of everlasting glory, of her love of the beauty of everlasting glory which Pericles had praised (II 64.3–6). Just as the Funeral Speech is followed by the plague, the Melian dialogue is followed by the Sicilian expedition. The Sicilian expedition, or rather its cause, not only the *stasis,* is a kind of grave sickness but a noble sickness. Thucydides speaks

of the *eros* of the Athenians for the Sicilian expedition.[86] Pericles had called upon the Athenians to become lovers (*erastai*) of their city (II 43.1). It was the community of lovers of their city who desired to adorn their beloved with the jewel Sicily. One could say that "Athens in Sicily" is greater than Pericles' Athens according to Pericles himself: it surpasses all other "everlasting memorials of evils" (II 41.4) which Athens has left anywhere. The *eros* of the Athenian for Sicily is the peak of his *eros* for his city, and that *eros* is his full dedication to his city, the willingness to sacrifice, to forget everything private for the sake of the city, a willingness which finds an appropriate and hence not unambiguous expression in what Pericles says in his Funeral Speech about the aged parents, the widows, and the orphans of the fallen soldiers. Or, as Alcibiades indicates, only glory after death brings about the perfect harmony between the private and the public (VI 16.5). If the highest *eros* is that for the city and if the city reaches its peak in an *eros* like that of Athens for Sicily, *eros* is of necessity tragic or, as Plato seems to suggest, the city is the tragedy *par excellence*.[87] In accordance with all this, Athens' defeat is her triumph: her enemies have to become in a manner Athenians in order to defeat her;[88] she is defeated because she has succeeded in becoming the teacher of Hellas. As for Sparta, her victory, whether due to Apollo or not, is of interest only as the reverse side of Athens' defeat.

## 9. *The Questionable Universalism of the City*

The reasoning which culminates in the opposition of the Spartan comedy and the Athenian tragedy starts from the "Athenian" assumption that precisely regarding the city the noble cannot be reduced to the pleasant and is superior to it. That assumption will also lead one to question the seemingly inhuman judgment on the choice made by the Melians to which we were led by starting from the assumption common to the Athenians and Thucydides which

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[86] VI 24.3. This is the only time that Thucydides himself uses the noun *eros*. Only one of his characters uses that noun: Diodotus (III 45.5). When speaking against the Sicilian expedition Nicias blames the *dyserotes tōn apontōn* (VI 13.1).

[87] *Laws* 817b.

[88] Cf. I 71.3 with VII 21.3–4; 36.2, 4; 37.1; 40.2; 55.

finds its clearest expression in what the Athenians say against the Melians' resolve. We must therefore take a further step. That necessity derives also from these considerations: according to Thucydides the Sicilian expedition was not doomed to failure or its failure cannot be explained by Athenian *hybris* however noble; the account of the Sicilian expedition is not the end of Thucydides' work; the agreement between Thucydides and Pericles is less complete than the argument of the preceding section assumed. In a word, that argument is too "poetic" in Thucydides' sense to be in ultimate agreement with his thought.[89]

According to Pericles, the present splendor of Athens gives rise

[89] If Thucydides has left his work unfinished, it does not follow that he did not intend to end it in the manner in which, and with the sentence or word with which, the version as we have it ends: an earlier version may cover the whole ground which the final version is intended to cover; the earlier version would differ from the final version only in lacking the final polish. It is, then, necessary to wonder whether the eighth book may not have been intended to be the last book. The core of the work is the two sequels "Funeral Speech–Plague" and "Melian Dialogue–Sicilian Disaster." These sequels suggest in the first place the "Spartan" notion of "moderation and the divine law." At closer inspection one sees "the Spartan comedy and the Athenian tragedy." The eighth book shows that this second thought too is "a beautiful falsehood": Athens does not go down; Athens' defeat in the Peloponnesian war is not the consequence of her failure in Sicily; she still could have won the war in the manner in which Pericles had planned to win it. The core of the Spartan comedy is "Pylos-Mantinea"; but "Mantinea" is also the non-comical restoration of Sparta's renown after Pylos. There is a corresponding non-tragic restoration of Athens' renown after Sicily: Kynossema (cf. VIII 106.2, 5 with V 75.3). To state the case in a formula–Pylos : Mantinea = Sicily : Kynossema. Athens' restoration after Sicily is, to say the least, not unconnected with the change from the democracy to the polity of 411 (VIII 97) which change in its turn is, to say the least, not unconnected with the return of Alcibiades from Sparta to Athens (86.4–8): the impious Alcibiades (53.2) restores moderation in Athens (cf. also 45.2, 4–5). The absence of speeches from VIII—with the exception, which is not negligible, of the excerpt from Pisander's speech in 53.3, a speech making clear the decisive importance for Athens' hope of the recall of Alcibiades and the modification of the democracy—together with the absence of speeches from V 10–84—helps to bring out the unity and the lustre of "the Melian Dialogue and the Sicilian Disaster." (As for the meaningful character of the end of VIII, consider also the reference to the Athenians' purification of Delos in 108.4.) Xenophon's account of the end of the Peloponnesian war, *i.e.* his implicit account of why Athens lost the war, is in full agreement with Thucydides; see especially *Hellenica* II 1.25–26 and context.

to the universal renown which she enjoys at present, and the splendor and the renown together vouch for her everlasting and universal fame in the future. She possesses universal control of the sea. She was or is present in every land. Her empire extends over more Greeks than any other Greek empire ever did, and if she wishes, it is susceptible of still further expansion. During the Peloponnesian war the conquest of Sicily, Carthage, and the whole mainland of Greece is already envisaged.[90] The longing for sempiternal and universal fame points towards universal rule; the concern with sempiternal and universal fame calls for boundless striving for ever more; it is wholly incompatible with moderation. The universalism of Athens, the universalism of the city (as distinguished from the desire for a limited goal like the rule over Sicily) is doomed to failure. It points therefore to a universalism of a different kind. Pericles says that the Athenians have left everywhere sempiternal memorials of evil things (which they inflicted on others or suffered themselves) and of good ones (of victories they gained and of benefits they bestowed). Thucydides on the other hand calls his work a sempiternal possession which is useful (I 22.4, II 41.4). Memorials are only to be looked at; possessions are owned. Memorials are very visible or obvious and they are not useful; a possession need not be obvious in order to be useful. Memorials are ambiguous and for show; a useful possession is of unambiguous solidity. The difference between the sempiternal memorials of evil things and of good ones and the sempiternal possession which is useful points to the difference between the brilliant and sham universalism of the city and the genuine universalism of understanding. For Thucydides bases his claim on behalf of his work on the fact that it brings to light the sempiternal and universal nature of man as the ground of the deeds, the speeches, and the thoughts which it records.

In the light of the full difference between the universalism of thought and the universalism of the city we understand Thucydides' agreement, not with Sparta, but with that moderation and piety by which Sparta claimed to be guided and which reveals itself less ambiguously in Nicias than in Sparta. It is hard but not altogether misleading to say that for Thucydides the pious understanding or judgment is true if for the wrong reasons; not the gods but nature

[90] II 41.4; 62.2, 4; 64.3, 5; VI 15.2, 34.2, 90.2–3, VII 66.2.

sets limits to what the city can reasonably attempt. Moderation is conduct in accordance with the nature of human things. The agreement between Thucydides and "Sparta" is reflected in the agreement between the men of noble simplicity and the men of Odyssean versatility who both become the victims of ruthless men with second-rate minds in times of civil discord (III 83). But the agreement between Thucydides and the Spartans, or the Melians, or Nicias, must not blind us to the fact that there is an equally important agreement among all political men, the Athenians included, by virtue of which they all differ from Thucydides. There is indeed a primary opposition between those (the Spartans, Nicias, the Melians) who merely wish to preserve the present or available things and those (the Athenians) who are haunted by the hope for immanifest future things. But on closer inspection the former too prove to depend on such hope.[91] In a language which is not that of Thucydides, there is something reminding of religion in Athenian imperialism.[92]

We must not forget however the kinship between the universalism of thought (Thucydides) and the universalism of the city (Athens)—a kinship which Thucydides has indicated most clearly by establishing some agreement between his archeology and the Funeral Speech. There is indeed a profound kinship between Thucydides' thought and the daring which is characteristic of Athens. However ambiguous that daring, that *mania,* which transcends the limits of moderation, may be on the political plane, it comes into its own, or is in accordance with nature, on the plane of thought, of the thinking individual. It comes into its own, not in Periclean (or post-Periclean) Athens as such but in the thought or the work of Thucydides. Not Periclean Athens but the understanding which is possible on the basis of Periclean Athens is the peak. Not Periclean Athens but the work of Thucydides is the peak. Thucydides redeems

[91] Cf. I 70.2, 7, V 87, 103.2, 113, VI 31.6, 93.

[92] The opposition and the agreement in the decisive respect between Pericles and Nicias may be illustrated by the following facts. Pericles avoids speaking of death and the dead in his Funeral Speech; the Funeral Speech is followed by the plague with its abundance of dead. Nicias in a way abandoned the fruit of his victory over the Corinthians by asking them for permission to collect two corpses which the Athenians had left behind (IV 44.5–6); at the end of his career, in Sicily, he was unable to arrange for the burial of the unnumbered Athenian corpses which were not in the hands of the enemy (VII 72.2, 75.3, 87.2).

Periclean Athens. And only by redeeming it does he preserve it "for ever." As little as there would be an Achilles or an Odysseus for us without Homer, as little would there be a Pericles for us without Thucydides: the everlasting glory for which Pericles longed is achieved not by Pericles but by Thucydides. The political daring and the virtues and vices which go with it make possible the highest daring. Understanding the universal and sempiternal things, seeing through the delusions by which the healthy city stands or falls, is possible only for thinkers who ride a tiger. One must go beyond this. In Athens the two heterogeneous universalisms become in a way fused: the fantastic political universalism becomes tinged, colored, suffused, transfigured by the true universalism, by the love of beauty and of wisdom as Thucydides understands beauty and wisdom, and it thus acquires its tragic character; it thus becomes able to foster a manly gentleness. The "synthesis" of the two universalisms is indeed impossible. It is of the utmost importance that this impossibility be understood. Only by understanding it can one understand the grandeur of the attempt to overcome it and sensibly admire it.

If the city cannot be understood except in the light of the universalism peculiar to it toward which it tends, and if that universalism in its turn by its essential defect points to the universalism of thought, we understand why Thucydides could present his whole wisdom in the form of a narrative interspersed with speeches which is severely limited to things political, which is severely political—which is silent about what is at present called Athenian culture. For many of our contemporaries that silence is not qualified, as it should be, by what he says and indicates about his work, his *logos*, for they understand the remarks in question as "methodological." Yet he does not only speak, however laconically, about his work and thought; as we have tried to show, he presents his thought, even his education, and therewith "Athenian culture." Through his work he makes us, in the light of the interplay of motion and rest, understand war and peace, barbarism and Greekness, Sparta and Athens; he enables us to understand, as far as in him lies, the nature of human life or to become wise. But one cannot become wise through understanding Thucydides' thought without realizing at the same time that it is through understanding Thucydides' thought that one is becoming wise, for wisdom is inseparable from self-knowledge. We know from Thucydides himself that he was an

Athenian. Through understanding him we see that his wisdom was made possible by "the sun" and by Athens—by her power and wealth, by her defective polity, by her spirit of daring innovation, by her active doubt of the divine law. By understanding his work one sees with one's own eyes that Athens was in a sense the home of wisdom. Only through becoming wise oneself can one recognize wisdom in others. Wisdom cannot be presented as a spectacle, in the way in which battles and the like can be presented. Wisdom cannot be "said." It can only be "done." Only through understanding Thucydides' work can one see that Athens was in a sense the school of Hellas; from Pericles' mouth we merely hear it asserted. Wisdom cannot be presented by being spoken about. An indirect proof of this is the insipid and at best shallow character of the chapters on the intellectual life of this period or that which form part of otherwise good modern histories.

One is led toward the deepest stratum in Thucydides' thought when one considers the tension between his explicit praise of Sparta —of Spartan moderation—which is not matched by a praise of Athens on the one hand, and on the other, the thesis of the archeology as a whole regarding the weakness of the ancients—a thesis which implies the certainty of progress and therewith the praise of innovating Athens. Thucydides does not unqualifiedly identify himself with "Athens." We must therefore reconsider the thesis of the archeology. The archeology sketches the emergence of Greekness, power, and wealth out of original barbarism, weakness, and poverty; it thus creates the impression that barbarism belongs together with weakness and poverty or that non-Greeks are pre-political savages (I 6.1, 5–6). It barely hints at the fact that there were powerful and wealthy non-Greek societies before there were any such Greek societies (I 9.2, 11.1–2, 13 end). Yet by admitting that some non-Greeks were civilized before Greeks one does not question the belief in progress. This belief is questioned not by Thucydides himself but by Diodotus. Still, Diodotus' speech reveals more of Thucydides himself than does any other speech. That speech contrasted with Cleon's speech which it opposes as well as with the Thebans' speech accusing the Plataeans reveals itself as a characteristically Athenian act—as no less characteristic of Athens than the Sicilian expedition but differing from the Sicilian expedition because it is inspired by moderation and mildness. It ought not to be surprising that the only action recorded by Thucydides which properly reflects his thought

on the political plane is an act of humanity which is compatible with the survival of Athens and even of her empire.

In order to prevent the killing of the Mytileneans which was favored by Cleon, Diodotus must first combat Cleon's denigration of his opponents and especially his calumniation of them as prompted by discreditable, selfish interest. Cleon's manner of proceeding is harmful to the city; it causes suspicion and fear and thus deprives the city of good advice. The city must give a fair and equal hearing to everyone who is willing to give his advice. In order to prevent the giving of advice under the influence of selfish motives, out of concern for the adviser's own aggrandizement or prestige, a sensible or moderate city would not honor a man more when he gives good advice, *i.e.* when his proposal is approved by the assembly, and less when he gives bad advice, *i.e.* when his proposal is rejected by the assembly; for if the suggested practice were followed, men would not speak for or against proposals merely in order to please the assembly (III 42). Diodotus seems to argue for complete equality, for the abolition even of that distinction by which democracy stands or falls, the distinction between the popular and the unpopular, between the honest men or friends of the *demos* and the corrupt men or enemies of the *demos*. If not every member of the assembly, at any rate every speaker must be treated as being equally competent and honest as every other; only in this way can ambition, striving for superiority and hence for inequality be eradicated. He simultaneously indicates the fact that citizens who are not wise cannot distinguish between good and bad advice but must identify good advice with advice convincing them or appealing to them, and leaves in the dark the fact that a speaker whose proposals are frequently approved by the assembly cannot fail to be regarded as wise and hence to gain prestige, and therefore that a man who is to the slightest degree ambitious will inevitably try to increase his prestige by making proposals which please the multitude. Differently stated, the prestige of Diodotus cannot well coexist with the prestige of Cleon: Diodotus himself is compelled to suggest, in contradiction to the principle which he advocates, that Cleon is either stupid or dishonest. Gomme underestimates the bearing of Diodotus' statement by saying that he "comes close to questioning the value of free debate." Diodotus adumbrates the problem of democracy in such a manner as to point to the regime in which only moderate and sensible men, in no way tainted by ambition, would have a

say.[93] Yet surely Athens is not "a moderate city" and Diodotus is compelled to persuade the Athenians to act moderately toward the Mytileneans. He illustrates his difficulty and his manner of overcoming it by speaking of the case wherein a speaker admittedly gives sound advice yet is suspected of giving that advice for the sake of his private gain; in that case the Athenians reject the sound advice out of envy. The *demos* is then not as good-natured as Cleon had maintained (III 38.2). From not entirely pure motives, democratic assemblies are more concerned with purity of a certain kind than with wisdom. Since they will not vote for a proposal unless they have trust in the proposer, and since they trust on grounds which are so little rational, not only bad men but good men as well are compelled to deceive the assembly and to lie to it. Perhaps one cannot benefit any city without deceiving it, for no city is likely to consist chiefly of perfectly wise and virtuous people; one surely cannot benefit Athens without deceiving her, one reason being that only the speakers are held responsible for what they propose and how they propose it whereas the assembly, the sovereign, has no responsibility (III 43). With an unheard of frankness,[94] Diodotus tells the Athenians that only by using a subterfuge will he be able to plead successfully for the mild treatment of the Mytileneans.

The subterfuge which Diodotus uses seems to consist in replacing the question of justice (are the Mytileneans guilty?) by the question of expediency (does Athens derive benefit from killing them?) (III 44). Yet why is that substitution a subterfuge? In order to lay a foundation for the proposal not to kill the Mytileneans, Diodotus raises the broad question as to whether capital punishment is expedient or wise under any circumstances: in order to be wise, capital punishment must have a deterring effect which it does not have as is shown by the fact that capital crimes are frequently committed;

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[93] Cleon may be said to state and to solve the problem as follows: you know your own limitations, you know that you lack judgment and therefore that you must trust others; but lacking judgment you cannot distinguish between those who deserve your trust and those who do not; I give you a criterion which you can understand: trust only people of your kind, people without refinement, people like me; to enable you to distinguish between me and other vulgarians, I tell you that I possess the Periclean quality of not being fickle.

[94] What Pericles says in II 62.1 approaches the trivial compared with what Diodotus says in III 43.2–3.

*nomos* is powerless against human *physis* (45). Whatever this argument may be worth in itself, its use in the circumstances seems to reveal no small lack of intelligence: by bidding the Athenians not to kill the Mytileneans on the ground that capital punishment is bad altogether, he preposterously bids them simultaneously to abolish capital punishment for murder, impiety, high treason, and other heinous crimes; he suggests that the Mytileneans are guilty of a capital crime according to the accepted standards. Yet he knows what he is doing. His statement about capital punishment implies that capital crimes are involuntary and hence, as Cleon had admitted, deserve pardon (40.1; cf. 39.2); it thus suggests that, assuming that the Mytileneans had committed a capital crime, they deserve pardon. He thus prepares his later questioning of that assumption or his proof that the majority of the Mytileneans had not committed a crime and therefore that the Athenians would commit a crime by killing them (47.3; cf. 46.5). He is then very far from simply disregarding, as he claims, the question of justice. Cleon had based his argument above all on the consideration of justice and secondarily on the consideration of expediency; he had ruled out of court the consideration of compassion and mildness as wholly incompatible with empire (40.2–3). Replying to Cleon and knowing the nature of the city, Diodotus refuses to appeal to the Athenians' compassion or mildness (48.1) without saying however that compassion and mildness have no place whatever in an empire, and he pretends to outdo Cleon by disregarding justice altogether and by considering expediency alone while however taking up the question of justice after he has put his audience in a mood in which it is willing to listen to a plea of innocence. He prepares that mood by vaguely suggesting that the Mytileneans might deserve pardon although they were guilty of a capital crime.

Diodotus' statement about capital punishment calls for special attention. Within that statement, almost literally in the center of his whole speech, he suggests that punishments were "softer" in the past, that in the olden times even the gravest crimes were not punished capitally, that realizing the ineffectiveness of soft punishments human beings first introduced capital punishment and then progressively extended capital punishment to ever more crimes (45.3). Men do not realize that punishment does not deter men from crimes because nature compels men to commit crimes or because *nomos* is powerless against *physis*. They expect more from

*nomos* now than in the olden times. In the oldest times, at the beginning, there was no *nomos* because there were no cities; there was no punishment proper; abstracting from everything else one might say that the first age was the age of Kronos. There surely has taken place a progress of the arts (and hence of power and wealth); but it would be wrong to believe that that progress is simply a progress in mildness.[95] The progress of art is accompanied by a progress of *nomos*—of law doing violence to nature, if only by concealing nature. Men are not simply milder now when Greekness is at its peak as is shown abundantly by Thucydides. The belief that man is at the peak now is therefore in need of qualification or revision. The difference between the wise and the unwise—that difference which makes it impossible for a wise man to benefit his city except by deceiving it—is not affected by the progress of the arts or of the laws. Men are not simply wiser and gentler than they were in the olden times. The belief in progress must be qualified with a view to the fact that human nature does not change.

It could seem that Thucydides himself confirms or at least illustrates Diodotus' thesis by his narrative of the Athenians' purification of Apollo's island which they undertook in compliance with an oracle (III 104). The tyrant Pisistratus had purified a part of the island; in the sixth year of the Peloponnesian war the Athenians purified the entire island. In the preceding year the plague had smitten them again and many earthquakes had occurred (87). Perhaps they felt guilty (cf. V 32). At any rate, for the sake of Delos' holiness, they forbade that anyone die or be born on the island; the dying and the women about to give birth were to be brought to another island close by which the tyrant Polycrates had dedicated to Apollo. After having purified the island, the Athenians instituted the Delian festival. In the olden times there had been a festival there which included an athletic and a music contest as well as performances of choruses sent by the cities of Ionia and the neighboring islands. This fact is proved by Homer of whom Thucydides here quotes thirteen verses whereas in the whole rest of his book he quotes only a single Homeric verse (I 9.4). The verses stand out from the rest of the work because they conjure an altogether peaceful scene. Homer exhorts the maidens who had participated in the Delian festival to remember him and to praise

[95] Cf. Plato, *Protagoras* 327c4–e3.

him as the sweetest and most enjoyable minstrel who frequently visited Delos. In post-Homeric times "the contests" ceased as a consequence of adversities. But now, in the sixth year of the Peloponnesian war, the Athenians restored the "contests" and added horse-races as an entirely novel feature. It is not clear whether the modern Delian festival surpasses the ancient. The horse-races surely constitute a progress;[96] but will they compensate for the absence of a Homer?[97]

## 10. *Political History and Political Philosophy*

Thucydides is not merely a political man who as such belongs to this city or that, but a historian who as such does not belong to any one city. Moreover, he is a historian who sees the singulars in the light of clearly grasped universals, the changing in the light of the permanent or sempiternal, of human nature as part of the whole which is characterized by the interplay between motion and rest; he is a philosophic historian. His thought is therefore not radically alien to that of Plato and Aristotle. It is true that he leaves matters at intimating what he regards as the originating principles whereas the philosophers make those principles their theme or, in other words, that it is evidently necessary to go beyond Thucydides toward the philosophers; but this does not mean that there is an opposition between Thucydides and the philosophers. What is true

[96] Cf. Plato, *Republic* 328a1–5.

[97] The account of the sixth year of the war or more precisely III 86–116 is characterized by the fact that "the interruption of the narrative for the sake of chronological order is carried to an extreme in the account of this campaign [in Sicily], and, since the campaign is not of the first importance and not very interesting, might, if taken by itself, justify Dionysius' and others' criticism of Thucydides' 'unfortunate chronological manner'." Gomme II 413. The fact mentioned is all the more striking since precisely in this context, in what one might call his third preface (III 90.1), Thucydides declares that as regards the things which happened in Sicily he will make mention only of the most memorable things among those which affected the Athenians. (As regards his "second preface," cf. p. 8 above.) The account given in III 86–116 consists of 15 items, 6 referring to Sicily, 3 to natural phenomena, and 1 to the purification of Delos. Demosthenes' campaign in Aetolia (including the only mention of Hesiod occurring in the book) is the central item. If one disregards the account of the purification of Delos one observes a strange regularity regarding the accounts of the Sicilian campaign on the one hand and those of natural phenomena on the other. Cf. also notes 10 and 83 above.

of philosophy in general is true of political philosophy in particular. If one does not limit oneself to contrasting easily quotable judgments of Thucydides and Plato on men like Themistocles and Pericles, if one considers that all these judgments are elliptical, and if therefore one ponders them, one realizes that the two thinkers are in fundamental agreement regarding the good and bad and the noble and base. It suffices to remind the reader of what the two thinkers indicate in regard to the order of rank of Sparta and Athens. Yet there is this difference between them: whereas Plato raises and answers the question of the best regime simply, Thucydides answers only the question as to the best regime which Athens had in his lifetime (VIII 97.2); but here again it is evidently necessary to go beyond Thucydides toward the philosophers who thematically discuss the question of the best regime simply. All of this amounts to saying that Thucydides' thought is inferior to Plato's thought. Or could Thucydides have had a positive reason for stopping on his ascent earlier than Plato?

One must compare comparable things. Thucydides did not write Socratic dialogues and Plato did not write an account of a contemporary war. But Plato in the third book of the *Laws* has sketched the development from the barbarism of the beginning up to the century in which he and Thucydides were born, and this sketch is comparable to Thucydides' archeology. In fact, apart from the *Menexenus*, which calls for comparison with the Funeral Speech, that sketch is the only part of Plato's works which lends itself to a direct and instructive confrontation with a part of Thucydides' work. As one ought to mention even in the most cursory remark, both archeologies have also in common that they equally spare Spartan feelings. We stress here only one point. Plato explains how the good Athenian regime which obtained at the time of the Persian war, the ancestral regime, was transformed into the extreme democracy of his time. He traces this change to the wilful disregard of the ancestral law regarding music and the theater: by making no longer the best and the wisest but the audience at large the judges of songs and plays, Athens decayed.[98] Shortly thereafter he contends that it was not the naval victory at Salamis but the land victories at Marathon and Plataeae which saved Greece.[99] These judgments

[98] *Laws* 698a9ff., 700a5–701c4.
[99] *Ibid.* 707a5–c7.

are in striking contrast to Thucydides' suggestions. On the basis of Thucydides one would rather have to say that the Athenians had no choice but to wage the battle of Salamis and, one thing leading to another, they were compelled to build the most powerful navy; for the navy they needed the poorest Athenians as oarsmen; they were therefore compelled to give the poor a much higher status in Athens than they had previously enjoyed: Athens was compelled to become a democracy; the democratization of Athens was not, as Plato wishes us to believe, an act of wilful folly or of choice but a necessity. Generally stated, it could appear that Plato in contradistinction to Thucydides makes too little allowance for fatality as distinguished from choice. In fact however there is no fundamental difference in this respect between the two thinkers. In the very context just referred to, Plato says that it is chance rather than man or human wisdom or folly which establishes regimes or which legislates. In other words, man is a kind of plaything of the gods.[100] Plato adds indeed that within very narrow limits men have a choice between different regimes. But this is not denied by Thucydides. Hence he cannot deny that it is necessary to raise the question of the best regime. One may say that this question is explicitly answered by such Thucydidean speakers as Athenagoras and Pericles but it is surely not even explicitly raised by Thucydides himself. He prefers a mixture of oligarchy and democracy to either of the pure forms but it is not clear whether he would unqualifiedly prefer that mixture to an intelligent and virtuous tyranny; he seems to doubt whether a regime superior to these two—aristocracy in Plato's or Aristotle's sense—would be possible. He surely never speaks in his own name of a virtuous city whereas he speaks of virtuous individuals. There seems to be, according to him, something in the nature of the city which prevents it from rising to the height to which a man may rise.

When Thucydides speaks in the first book of the causes or justifications of the Peloponnesian war, he stresses three of them: the Spartans' fear of Athens' increasing power, the breach of the treaty, and the pollution contracted at the time of Cylon. He does not speak there with equal emphasis of a fourth cause or justification which would seem to be the most noble: the liberation of the Greek cities from Athens' tyranny. This cause is based on the premise that,

[100] *Ibid.* 709a1–3; cf. 644d7–e4 and 803c4–5.

as of right, every city is independent or is an equal member of the whole comprising all Greek cities, regardless of whether it is large or small, strong or weak, rich or poor. Accordingly there is a good common to all Greek cities which should limit the ambitions of each. The self-sufficiency of the city as Plato and Aristotle presuppose it excludes the city's dependence on such a society of cities or its being essentially a member of it. Aristotle goes so far as to visualize a perfectly good city which has no "foreign relations" whatever.[101] The lesson of Thucydides' work as a whole may be said to be that the order of cities which is presupposed in the most noble Spartan proclamations is altogether impossible, given the unequal power of the different cities which inevitably leads to the consequence that the most powerful cities cannot help being hegemonial or even imperial. But that lesson also renders questionable a presupposition of classical political philosophy; it excludes the kind of self-sufficiency of the city which classical political philosophy presupposes. The city is neither self-sufficient nor is it essentially a part of a good or just order comprising many or all cities. The lack of order which necessarily characterizes the "society" of the cities or, in other words, the omnipresence of War puts a much lower ceiling on the highest aspiration of any city toward justice and virtue than classical political philosophy might seem to have admitted.

Most of the speeches and all debates occurring in Thucydides' work deal with foreign politics, with what a given city or group of cities ought to do in regard to another city or group of cities. But the subject of debates is whatever is in the foreground of attention or is primary for the citizen. For the city which is not on the verge of civil war or in it, the most important questions concern its relations with other cities. Not without reason does Thucydides make his Diodotus call freedom (*i.e.* freedom from foreign domination) and empire "the greatest things" (III 45.6). Generally speaking, even the lowliest men prefer being subjects to men of their own people rather than to any aliens. If this is so, foreign politics is primary "for us," although it may not be primary "in itself" or "by nature." Thucydides does not rise to the heights of classical political philosophy because he is more concerned than is classical political philosophy with what is "first for us" as distinguished from what

[101] *Politics* 1325b23–32.

is "first by nature." Philosophy is the ascent from what is first for us to what is first by nature. This ascent requires that what is first for us be understood as adequately as possible in the manner in which it comes to sight prior to the ascent. In other words, political understanding or political science cannot start from seeing the city as the Cave but it must start from seeing the city as a world, as the highest in the world; it must start from seeing man as completely immersed in political life: "the present war is the greatest war." Classical political philosophy presupposes the articulation of this beginning of political understanding but it does not exhibit it as Thucydides does in an unsurpassable, nay, unrivalled manner. The quest for that "common sense" understanding of political things which led us first to Aristotle's *Politics,* leads us eventually to Thucydides' *War of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians.*

Yet most of the time the city is at peace. Most of the time the city is not immediately exposed to that violent teacher War, and to unsought compulsions, and hence the city's inhabitants are of kindlier thoughts than they are when at war (III 82.2). Accordingly most of the time they are given to admiration of the ancient, of the ancestral, rather than to immersion in the present (I 21.2). Not being prompted to take violent courses, they praise and even practice moderation and obedience to the divine law. Neither according to the classical philosophers[102] nor according to Thucydides is the concern with the divine simply the primary concern of the city, but the fact that it is primary "for us," from the point of view of the city, is brought out more clearly by Thucydides than by the philosophers. It suffices to remember what Thucydides tells us about oracles, earthquakes, and eclipses, Nicias' deeds and sufferings, the Spartans' compunctions, the affair of Cylon, the aftermath of the battle of Delium, and the purification of Delos—in brief, all these things for which the modern scientific historian has no use or which annoy him, and to which classical political philosophy barely alludes because for it the concern with the divine has become identical with philosophy. We would have great difficulty in doing justice to this remote or dark side of the city but for the work of men like Fustel de Coulanges above all others who have made us see the city as it primarily understood itself as distinguished from the manner in which it was exhibited by classical political philosophy:

[102] Cf. *Politics* 1328b11–12.

the holy city in contradistinction to the natural city. Our gratitude is hardly diminished by the fact that Fustel de Coulanges, his illustrious predecessors, Hegel above all, and his numerous successors have failed to pay proper attention to the philosophic concept of the city as exhibited by classical political philosophy. For what is "first for us" is not the philosophic understanding of the city but that understanding which is inherent in the city as such, in the prephilosophic city, according to which the city sees itself as subject and subservient to the divine in the ordinary understanding of the divine or looks up to it. Only by beginning at this point will we be open to the full impact of the all-important question which is coeval with philosophy although the philosophers do not frequently pronounce it—the question *quid sit deus.*